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# **ISLAM ON THE CROSSROADS**



# ISLAM ON THE CROSSROADS

BY

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## ERRATA

Page	Line	
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16	17	" " "indispensible" <i>read:</i> "indis-
21	17	<i>after</i> "out" <i>add</i> "of". [ pensable".
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99	23	" " <i>فليعتبروا</i> " <i>فليعتبروا</i>
106	16	" " "with" " "we",
106	26	" " "fundamental" <i>read:</i> "funda-
110		<i>last:</i> <i>before</i> "be" <i>insert</i> "to". [ mental".

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الحمد لله وحده  
والصلوة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده

## FOREWORD

SELDOM was a period intellectually as restless as ours is. Not only are we faced by a multitude of problems requiring new and unprecedented solutions, but also the angle of vision in which these problems appear before us is different from anything we were accustomed to till now. In all countries society passes through fundamental changes. The pace at which this happens is everywhere different; but everywhere we can observe the same pressing energy which allows of no halt or hesitation.

The World of Islam is no exception in this respect. Here also we see old customs and ideas gradually disappearing and new forms emerging. Whereto does this development go? How deep

does it reach? How far does it fit into the cultural mission of Islam?

This book has no pretensions to give an exhaustive answer to these questions. Owing to its limited space only one of the problems facing the Muslims to-day, namely, the attitude they should adopt towards the Western civilization, has been selected for discussion. The vast implications of the subject, however, made it necessary to extend our scrutiny over some basic aspects of Islam, more particularly with regard to the principle of Sunnah. It was impossible to give here more than the bare outline of a theme wide enough to fill many bulky volumes. But none the less—or perhaps, therefore—I feel confident that this brief sketch would prove, for others, an incentive to further thought on this most important problem.

And now a few words about myself—because the Muslims have a right, when a convert speaks to them, to know how and why he has embraced Islam.

In 1922 I left my native country, Austria, to travel as a Special Correspondent to some of the leading Continental newspapers through Africa and Asia; and since then I have spent nearly the whole of my time in the Islamic East. My interest in the nations with which I came into contact was

in the beginning that of an outsider only. I saw before me a social order and an outlook on life fundamentally different from the European; and from the very beginning there grew in me a sympathy for the calmer—I should like to say: more human—conception of life, as compared with the hasty, mechanized mode of living in Europe. This sympathy gradually led me to an investigation of the reasons for such a difference, and I became interested in the religious teachings of the Muslims. That interest was, at the time in question, not strong enough to draw me into the fold of Islam, but it opened to me a new vista on the possibilities of human society being organized with a minimum of internal conflicts and a maximum of real brotherly feeling. The reality, however, of the Islamic life at present appeared to be very far from the ideal possibilities given in the religious teachings of Islam. Whatever in Islam was progress and movement, had become, among the Muslims, indolence and stagnation; whatever in Islam was generosity and appeal for self-sacrifice, was, among the present-day Muslims, perverted into narrow-mindedness and selfishness.

Prompted by this discovery I tried to approach the problem before me from a more intimate point of view: that is, I tried to imagine myself as one within

the circle of Islam. It was a purely intellectual experiment; and it revealed to me, within a very short time, the right solution. I realized that the one and only reason for the social and cultural decay of the Muslims consisted in the fact that they had gradually ceased to follow the teachings of Islam in spirit. Their society was built, from the very outset, on religious fundamentals alone, and therefore a weakening of the fundamentals has necessarily weakened the cultural structure, and might possibly cause its ultimate disappearance.

The more I understood how concrete and how immensely practical the teachings of Islam are, the more eager became my questioning as to why the Muslims have abandoned their full application to real life. I discussed this problem with many thinking Muslims in almost all the countries between the Lybian Desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea. It became almost an obsession, and it ultimately overshadowed all my other intellectual interests in the World of Islam. The questioning grew in emphasis—till I, the non-Muslim, talked to Muslims as if I were to defend Islam from their negligence and indolence. The progress was imperceptible to me, until one day—it was in autumn 1925, in the mountains of Afghanistan—a young provincial governor said to me:

"But you are a Muslim, only you don't know it yourself." I was struck by these words and remained silent. But when I came back to Europe once again, in 1926, I saw that the only logical consequence of my attitude was, to embrace Islam.

So much about the *how* of my becoming a Muslim. Since then I was asked, time and again : "*Why* did you embrace Islam ? What was it that attracted you particularly ?"—and I must confess : I don't know of any satisfactory answer. It was not any particular teaching that attracted me, but the whole wonderful, inexplicably coherent structure of moral teaching and practical life programme. I could not say, even now, which aspect of it appeals to me more than any other. Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other ; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure. Probably this feeling, that everything in the teachings and postulates of Islam is "in its proper place", has created the strongest impression on me ; there might have been, along with it, other impressions also which to-day it is difficult for me to analyze. After all, it was a matter of love ; and love is com-

posed of many things : of our desires and our loneliness, of our high aims and our shortcomings, of our strength and our weakness. So it was in my case. Islam came over me, like a robber enters a house by night : but, unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good.

Since then I have tried to learn of Islam as much as I could. I studied the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ; I studied the language of Islam and its history, and a good deal of what has been written about it and against it. I have spent over five years in the Hejaz and Nejd, and most of it in Medina, so that I might experience something of the original surroundings in which this religion was preached by the Arabian Prophet. As the Hejaz is the meeting centre of Muslims from many countries, I was able to compare most of the different religious and social views prevalent in the Islamic World in our days. Those studies and comparisons created in me the firm conviction that Islam, as a spiritual and a social phenomenon, is still, in spite of all the drawbacks caused by the deficiencies of the Muslims, by far the greatest driving force mankind has ever experienced ; and all my interests became, since then, centred around the problem of its regeneration.

This little book is a humble contribution towards this great goal. It has developed out of a few lectures delivered last year in Madras and before the Young Muslim Brotherhood in Delhi. It is not written for those with whom Islam is only one of the many, more or less useful, accessories to social life; but rather for those in whose hearts still lives a spark of the flame which burned in the Companions of the Prophet,—the flame that once made Islam great as a social order and a cultural achievement.

*Delhi, April 1934.*





# I

## THE OPEN ROAD OF ISLAM

ONE of the slogans most characteristic of the present age is "the conquest of space". Means of communication have been developed which were far beyond the dreams of the former generations; and they have set in motion a far more rapid and extensive transfer of goods than ever before within the history of mankind. The result of this development has been an economic interdependence of nations. No single nation or group can afford to-day to remain aloof from the rest of the world. Economics have ceased to be local. Their character has become worldwide. They ignore, at least in their tendencies, political boundaries and geographical spaces. They carry with themselves—and this possibly is even more important than the purely material side of the problem—the ever-increasing necessity of a transfer not only of goods, but also of thoughts and cultural

currents. But while these two forces, the economical and the cultural, often go hand in hand, there is a difference in their dynamic rules. The elementary laws of economics require that the exchange of goods between nations be mutual; this means that no nation can act as buyer only, while another nation is always seller; in the long run each of them must play both rôles simultaneously, giving to, and taking from, each other, be it directly or through the medium of other actors in the play of economic forces. But on the cultural field this iron rule of exchange is not a necessity, at least not always a visible one; that is to say, the transfer of ideas and cultural influences is not necessarily based on the principle of give and take. It lies in human nature that nations and civilizations which are politically and economically more virile, exert a strong fascination on the weaker and less active ones and influence them in the intellectual and social spheres without being influenced themselves. Such is the situation to-day as regards the relations between the Western and the Muslim World.

From the viewpoint of the historical observer the strong, one-sided influence which the Western civilization exerts on the Muslim World at present is not surprising at all, because it is the outcome of a long historic process for which there are several

analogies elsewhere. But while the historian may be satisfied, for us others the problem remains unsettled. For us who are not mere interested spectators, but very real actors in this drama,—for us who regard themselves as the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) the problem in reality begins here. We believe that Islam, unlike other religions, is not only a spiritual attitude of mind adjustable to different cultural settings, but a self-sufficing orbit of culture and a social system of clearly defined features. When a foreign civilization extends its radiations into our midst and causes certain changes in our own cultural organism, as is the case to-day, we are bound to make it clear to ourselves whether that foreign influence runs in the direction of our own cultural possibilities or whether it destroys them; whether it acts as an invigorating serum in the body of the Islamic culture, or as a poison.

An answer to this question can be found through analysis only. We have to discover the motive forces of both civilizations—the Islamic and that of the modern West—and to investigate how far a co-operation is possible between them. As the Islamic civilization is essentially a religious one, we must define the general rôle of religion in human life.

What we call the "religious attitude" of man is the natural outcome of his intellectual and biological conditions. Man is unable to explain to himself the mystery of life, the mystery of birth and death, the mystery of infinity and eternity. His reasoning stops before impregnable walls. He can, therefore, do two things only. The one is, to give up all attempts to understand life as a totality. In this case man will rely upon the evidence of external experiences alone and limit all his conclusions to their sphere. Thus he will be able to understand single fragments of life which may increase in number and clarity as rapidly or as slowly as the human knowledge of Nature increases, but will, none the less, always remain only fragments of a totality to grasp which is beyond the methodical equipment of human reason. This is the way the exact sciences go. The other possibility—which may well exist side by side with the scientific one—is the way of religion. It leads man, by means of an inner, mostly intuitive experience, to the acceptance of a unitary explanation of life, generally on the assumption that there exists a supreme Creative Power which governs the universe according to some pre-conceived plan above and beyond human understanding. As has been just said, this conception does not necessarily preclude man from the investigation of such facts

and fragments of life as offer themselves for external observation; there is no inherent antagonism between the external (scientific) and the internal (religious) perception. But the latter one is, in fact, the only speculative possibility to conceive all life as a unity in essence and motive power and as a well-balanced, harmonious totality. The term "harmonious", though so terribly misused, is very important in this connexion, because it implies a corresponding attitude in man. The religious man knows that whatever happens to him and within him can never be the result of a blind play of forces without consciousness and purpose: he believes it to be the outcome of God's conscious will alone, and therefore an organic part of a universal plan. In this way man is enabled to solve the bitter antagonism between the human Ego and the objective world of facts and appearances which is called Nature. The human being with all the intricate mechanism of his soul, with all his desires and fears, his feelings and his speculative uncertainties, sees himself faced by a Nature in which bounty and cruelty, danger and security are mixed in a wondrous, inexplicable way and apparently work on lines entirely different from the structure of human reasoning and its methods. Never has purely intellectual philosophy or experimental science been

able to solve this conflict. This exactly is the point where religion steps in.

In the light of religious perception and experience the human, self-conscious Ego and the mute, seemingly irresponsible Nature are brought together into a relation of spiritual harmony : because both, the individual consciousness of man and the Nature that surrounds him and is within him, are nothing but co-ordinate, if different, manifestations of one and the same Creative Will. The immense benefit which religion thus confers upon man is the realization, that he is, and can never cease to be, a well-planned unit in the eternal movement of creation. He is a definite part in the infinite organism of universal destiny. The psychological consequence of this conception is the deep feeling of a spiritual security, and that balance between expectations and fears which distinguishes the positively religious man from the irreligious.

This fundamental position is common to all great religions, whatever their denominations may be; and equally common to all of them is the moral appeal to man, to surrender himself to the manifest will of God. But Islam, and Islam alone, goes beyond this theoretical explanation and exhortation. It teaches man not only that all life is essentially a unity, because it proceeds out of the Divine Oneness,

but it shows us also the practical way how everyone of us can reproduce, within the limits of his individual, earthly life, the unity of Idea and Action both in his existence and in his consciousness. To attain that supreme goal of life, man is, in Islam, not compelled to renounce the world; no austerities are required to open a secret door to spiritual purification; no pressure is exerted upon the mind to believe incomprehensible dogmas in order that salvation may be secured. Such things are utterly foreign to Islam. It is neither a mystical doctrine nor a philosophy. It is simply a programme of life according to the rules of Nature which God has decreed upon his creation, and its supreme achievement is the complete co-ordination of the spiritual and the material aspects of human life. In the teachings of Islam, both these aspects are not only reconciled to each other in the sense that there is no inherent conflict between the bodily and the moral existence of man, but in addition to this, the fact of their co-existence and actual inseparability is insisted upon as the natural basis of life.

This is the reason, I think, for the peculiar form of the Islamic *prayer* in which spiritual concentration and certain bodily movements are co-ordinated with each other. Inimical critics of Islam generally select this kind of prayer as the proof of



their allegations that Islam is a religion of formalism and outwardness. And, in fact, for people of other religions who are accustomed neatly to separate the "spiritual" from the "bodily" almost in the same way as the dairy-man separates the cream from the milk, it is difficult to understand that in the unskimmed milk of Islam both the ingredients, though distinct in their respective constitutions, harmoniously live and express themselves together. In other words, the Islamic prayer consists of mental concentration *and* bodily movements, because the human life itself is of such a dual composition, and because we are supposed to approach God through the sum total of the faculties He has bestowed upon us.

A further illustration of this attitude can be seen in the institution of the *Tawaf*, the ceremony of walking round the Kaaba in Mecca. As it is an indispensable obligation of everyone who enters the Holy City to go seven times round the Kaaba; and as the observance of this injunction is one of the three most essential points in the Islamic pilgrimage, we have the right to ask ourselves: What is the meaning of this? Is there any spiritual necessity to show our devotion in such a peculiar, formal way?

The answer is quite obvious. If we go in a circular movement around some object we thereby establish that object as the central point of our

action. The Kaaba, towards which every Muslim turns his face in prayer, symbolizes the Oneness of God. The bodily movement of the pilgrims in the *Tawaf* symbolizes the activity of human life. Consequently, the *Tawaf* means that not only our devotional thoughts, but also our practical life, our actions and endeavours, must have the idea of God and His Oneness for their centre, as it is said in the Holy Quran :

وما خلقت الجن والانس الا ليعبدون

“ I have not created the Jinn and the Man but that they shall worship Me.”

The conception of “worship” in Islam is different from that in any other religion. Here worship is not restricted to the purely devotional practices, as for example prayers or fasting, but it extends over the whole of man’s *practical* life as well. If the object of our life as a whole is the worship of God, then we necessarily must regard this life, in the totality of all its aspects, as one complex moral responsibility. Thus all our actions, even the seemingly trivial ones, must be performed as acts of worship, that is, performed consciously as constituting a part of God’s universal plan. Such a state of things is, for the man of average capability, a distant ideal ; but is it not a purpose of religion to bring ideals into real existence ?

The position of Islam is unmistakable in this respect. It teaches us, firstly, that the permanent worship of God in all the manifold actions of human life is the very meaning of this life; and, secondly, that the achievement of this purpose remains impossible as long as we divide our life into two parts, the spiritual and the material; they must be bound together, in our consciousness and our actions, into one harmonious entity. Our notion of God's Oneness must be reflected in our own striving towards a co-ordination and unification of the various aspects of our life.

A logical consequence of this attitude is a further difference between Islam and all other known religious systems. It is to be found in the fact that Islam, as a teaching, undertakes to define not only the metaphysical relations between man and his Creator, but also—and with scarcely less insistence—the earthly relations between the individual and his social surroundings. The wordly life is not regarded as a mere empty shell, as a meaningless shade of the Hereafter that is to come, but as a self-contained and positive entity. God Himself is a Unity not only in essence, but also in purpose; and therefore His creation is a Unity, possibly in essence, but surely in purpose.

Worship of God in the wide sense just explained constitutes the meaning of human life according to Islam. And it is this conception alone that shows us the possibility of man's reaching *perfection* within his individual, earthly life. Of all religious systems Islam alone declares that individual perfection is possible in our earthly existence. Islām does not postpone this fulfilment till after a suppression of the so-called "bodily" desires, as the Christian teaching does, nor does Islam promise a continuous chain of re-births on a progressively higher plane, as is the case with Hinduism, nor does Islam agree with Buddhism, according to which perfection and salvation may be attained through the annihilation of the individual Self and its emotional links with the world. No :—Islam is emphatic in the assertion that man can reach perfection in his earthly, individual life, and by making full use of all the worldly possibilities of his life.

To avoid misunderstandings the term "perfection" will have to be defined in the sense it is used here. As long as we have to do with human, biologically limited beings we cannot possibly consider the idea of an "absolute" perfection, because everything that is absolute belongs to the realm of the Divine attributes alone. Human perfection in its true psychological and moral sense must necessarily have

a relative and purely individual bearing. It does not imply the possession of *all* imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of *new* qualities from outside, but solely the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual in such a way as to rouse his innate, but otherwise dormant powers. Owing to the natural variety of life-phenomena the inborn qualities of man differ in each individual case. It would be absurd, therefore, to suppose that all human beings should, or even could, strive towards one and the same "type" of perfection—just as it would be absurd to expect a perfect race horse and a perfect heavy draught horse to possess exactly the same qualities. Both may be individually perfect and satisfactory, but they will be different, because their original characters are different. With human beings the case is similar. If perfection were to be standardized in a certain "type"—as Christianity does in the type of the ascetic saint—then men would have to give up, or change, or suppress, their individual differentiation. But this would clearly violate the Divine law of individual variety which dominates all life in the world. Islam, which is not a religion of repression, allows therefore to man a very wide margin in his personal and social existence, so that the various qualities, temperaments and psychological in-

clinations of the different individuals may find the way to positive development according to their individual predisposition. Thus a man may be an ascetic, or he may enjoy the full measure of his sensual possibilities within the lawful limits; he may be a nomad roaming through the deserts, without food for to-morrow, or a rich merchant surrounded by his goods. As long as he submits sincerely and consciously to the laws decreed by God, he is free to shape his personal life to whatever his nature directs him. His duty is to make the best of himself, in order that he may honour the life-gift which his Creator has bestowed upon him, and to help his fellow-beings, by means of his own development, in their spiritual, social and material endeavours. But the *form* of his individual life is in no way fixed by a standard. He is free to choose out the limitless lawful possibilities.

The basis of this "Liberalism" in Islam is to be found in the conception that the original nature (فطرة) of man is essentially good. Contrary to the Christian idea that man is born sinful, or the teachings of Hinduism, that he is originally low and impure and must painfully stagger through a long chain of transmigrations towards the ultimate goal of perfection, the Islamic teaching contends that man is born pure and—in the sense explained before—individually perfect. It is said in the Quran :

لقد خلقنا الإنسان في أحسن تقويم

"Surely We create man in the best structure..."

—but in the same breath the verse continues :

ثم رددناه أسفل سافلين إلا الذين آمنوا وعملوا الصالحات

"...and afterwards We reduce him to the lowest of low : with the exception of those who believe and do good works."

In this verse is expressed not only the doctrine that man is originally good and pure, but it is also implied that unbelief in God and lack of good actions destroy this original perfection. On the other hand, man may retain, or regain, his individual perfection if he consciously realizes God's Oneness and submits to His laws. Thus wickedness, according to Islam, is never essential or even original ; it is an acquisition of man's later life and is due to a misuse of the innate, positive qualities with which God has endowed every human being. Those qualities are, as has been said before, different in the individuals, but always perfect in themselves ; and their full development is possible within the period of man's individual life on earth. We take it for granted that the life after death, owing to its entirely changed conditions of feeling and perception will confer upon us other, quite new qualities and faculties which will make a still further progress of the human soul possible ; but this concerns our future life alone. In this earthly life also,

the Islamic teaching definitely asserts, we can reach—everyone of us—a full measure of perfection by developing the positive, already existing qualities of which our individuality is composed.

Of all religions Islam alone makes it possible for man to enjoy the full range of his earthly life without losing for a moment its spiritual orientation. How entirely different is this from the Christian conception ! According to the Christian dogma, mankind stumbles under a hereditary sin committed by Adam and Eve, and consequently the whole life is regarded—in the dogmatic theory at least—as a gloomy dale of sorrows. It is the battlefield of two opposed forces : the evil, represented by Satan, and the good, represented by Jesus Christ. The Satan tries, by means of bodily temptations, to bar the progress of the human soul towards the eternal light. Thus the soul belongs to Christ, while the body is the playground of satanic influences. One could express it differently : the World of matter is essentially satanic, while the World of Spirit alone is divine and good. Everything in human nature that is material, or “ carnal,” as the Christian theology prefers to call it, is a direct result of Adam’s succumbing to the advice of the hellish Prince of Darkness and Matter. To obtain salvation, therefore, man must turn his heart away from this world of flesh towards



the future, spiritual world, where the sin of mankind is redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ.

Even if this dogma is not obeyed in practice—as is the case in the Christian World at present—the very existence of such a teaching tends to produce a permanent feeling of bad conscience in the religiously inclined man. He is tossed about between the religious call to neglect the world and the natural urge of his heart to live and to enjoy this life. The very idea of an unavoidable, because inherited, sin, and its mystical—for the average intellect incomprehensible—redemption through the suffering of Jesus on the cross, erects a barrier between man and his legitimate desire to live.

In Islam we know nothing of a hereditary sin; we regard it as incongruent with the idea of God's justice. God does not make the child responsible for the doings of his father; and how could He have made all those numberless generations of mankind responsible for a sin of disobedience committed by a remote ancestor? It is no doubt possible to construct philosophical explanations for this strange assumption, but that will be, for the unsophisticated intellect, as artificial and as unsatisfactory as the conception of Trinity itself. As there is no hereditary sin, there is also no universal redemption of mankind in the teachings of Islam. Redemption and damnation

are individual. Every Muslim is his own redeemer ; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart. It is said in the Quran of the human soul :

لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ

“ It will get whatever it has earned and whatever it has become guilty of.”

Another verse says :

لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

“ Man will not receive but what he has endeavoured.”

But although Islam does not share the gloomy aspect of life as expressed in Christianity, it teaches us, none the less, not to attribute an exaggerated value to the earthly life as the modern Western civilization does. The Christian outlook is “The earthly life is a bad business.” The modern West—as distinct from Christianity—adores life in exactly the same way as the glutton adores his food: he devours it, but has no respect for it. Islam, on the other hand, looks upon the earthly life with calmness and respect. It does not worship life, but regards it as a passing stage on our way to a higher existence. But just because it is a stage, and a necessary stage, too, man has no right to despise or even to under-rate the value of his earthly life. Our travel through this world is a necessary, positive part in God’s plan. Human life, therefore, is of a tremendous value;

Moral knowledge, according to the teachings of Islam, automatically forces a moral responsibility upon man. A mere platonic discernment between Right and Wrong, without the urge to promote the Right and to destroy the Wrong, is a gross immorality in itself. In Islam, morality lives and dies with the human endeavour to establish its victory upon earth.

## II

### THE TRAGEDY OF EUROPE

IN the foregoing chapter an attempt has been made to give an outline of the moral fundamentals of Islam. We easily realize that the Islamic civilization is the most complete form of Theocracy history has ever known. Religious consideration is here above everything and underlies everything. If we compare this attitude with that of the Western civilization, we are impressed by the vast difference of outlook.

The modern West is ruled, in its activities and endeavours, by considerations of practical utility and dynamic expansion alone. Its inherent aim is the experimenting with, and the discovery of, the potentialities of life, without attributing to this life a *moral* reality of its own. For the modern European the question of meaning and purpose of life has long since lost all its practical importance. Important is

for him only the question as to what *forms* our life can assume, and whether the human race as such is progressing towards ultimate mastership over nature, or not. This last question the modern European answers in an affirmative sense; and here he is in agreement with Islam. In the Holy Quran God says of Adam and his race :

انى جاعل فى الأرض خليفة

“ I am placing a vice-gerent on earth.”

This means that man is destined to rule and to progress on earth. But the difference between the Islamic and the Western viewpoints is as to the *quality* of the human progress. The modern West believes in the possibility of a progressive spiritual improvement of mankind, in the collective sense, by means of their practical achievements and the development of scientific thought. The Islamic viewpoint, however, is diametrically opposed to this Western, dynamic conception of humanity. Islam regards the spiritual possibilities of the collective “mankind” as a static quantity : as something that has been definitely laid down in the very constitution of the human nature as such. Islam has never accepted for granted, as the West does, that the human nature—in the sense of a super-individual entity—is undergoing a process of

progressive change and improvement in a similar way as a tree grows: because the basis of that nature, the human soul, is not a biological quantity. The fundamental mistake of the modern European thought, to regard an increase of material knowledge and comfort as identical with a spiritual and moral improvement of mankind, was possible only because of the equally fundamental mistake which consisted in applying biological rules on non-biological facts. At the root of it lies the Western unbelief in the existence of a soul as distinct from matter. Islam, on the contrary, being based on transcendental conceptions, regards the existence of a soul as a reality beyond any discussion. Though certainly not opposed to each other, material and spiritual progress are, according to Islam, two distinctly different aspects of human life; the one has nothing to do with the other, neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. They may exist side by side, and again they may not. While clearly admitting the possibility, and strongly asserting the desirability, of an intellectual and material progress of mankind as a collective body, Islam as clearly denies the possibility of a spiritual improvement of humanity as a whole by means of its collective achievements. The dynamic element of spiritual improvement is limited to the *individual* being,

extended over vast territories and heterogeneous populations. But both Empires were directed, during the whole of their existence, by utterly different motive forces and had, so to say, different historical purposes to fulfil. Even on the morphological side we observe a vast difference between the Islamic and the Roman Empires. It took the Roman Empire nearly 1000 years to grow to its full geographical extent and its political maturity; while the Islamic Empire sprang up and grew to its ripeness and might within the short period of about 80 years. As regards their respective decay the difference is even more enlightening. The downfall of the Roman Empire, finally caused by the migrations of the Huns and the Goths, was effected during one single century - and was effected so completely that nothing of it remained but works of literature and architecture. The Byzantine Empire, which is commonly supposed to be the direct heir of the Roman Empire, was an heir only in so far as it continued to rule over some of the territories which had once formed part of the latter. Its social structure and its political organization had hardly anything to do with the conceptions of Roman polity. The Islamic Empire, on the contrary, as embodied in the Caliphate, underwent certain deformations and many dynastic changes in the

course of its long existence, but its structure essentially remained the same. As to external attacks, even that of the Mongols, which was far more violent than anything the Roman Empire had ever experienced at the hands of the Huns or the Goths, had not been able to shake the social organization and the unbroken political existence of the Empire of the Caliphs, though it undoubtedly contributed to the economic and intellectual stagnation of the later times. In contrast to the one century which was needed to destroy the Roman Empire, the Islamic Empire of the Caliphs needed more than 1200 years of slow decay till its ultimate political breakdown, represented in the extinction of the Ottoman Caliphate, was effected and followed by the first signs of dissolution in the Islamic social structure which we are witnessing at present.

This forces the conclusion upon us that the inner strength and the social soundness of the Islamic World were superior to anything mankind has ever experienced in the way of social organization. Even the Chinese civilization, which has shown similar powers of resistance through many centuries, cannot be used as a comparison here. China lies on the edge of a continent, and was till half a century ago—that is, till the rise of modern Japan—far from any rival power; but the Islamic



Empire stretched over three continents and was all the time surrounded by inimical powers of considerable strength and vitality. Since the dawn of history the so-called Near East was the volcanic centre of conflicting racial and intellectual energies ; but the resistance of the Islamic social organization was, till recently at least, invincible. We have not to search far for an explanation of this wonderful spectacle : it was the religious teaching of the Quran that gave a solid fundament, and the life-example of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) that became a band of steel around the grand social structure. The Roman Empire had no such spiritual element to keep it together, and therefore it broke down so rapidly.

But there is yet a further difference between these two old Empires. While in the Islamic Empire there was no privileged nation, and power was made subservient to the propagation of an idea regarded by its torchbearers as the sublime religious truth, the idea underlying the Roman Empire was the conquest of power and the exploitation of other nations for the benefit of the mother country alone. To promote better living for a privileged group, no violence was for the Roman too bad, no injustice too base. The famous "Roman justice" was justice for the Romans alone. It is clear that such an

attitude was possible only on the basis of an entirely materialistic conception of life and civilization—a materialism certainly refined by an intellectual taste, but none the less foreign to all spiritual values. The Romans never in reality knew religion. Their traditional gods were a pale imitation of the Greek mythology, colourless ghosts silently accepted for the matter of social convention. In no way were the gods allowed to interfere with real life. They had to give oracles through the medium of their priests, if they were asked; but they were never supposed to confer moral laws upon men.

This was the soil out of which the modern Western civilization grew. It undoubtedly received many other influences in the course of its development, and it naturally changed and modified the cultural inheritance of Rome in more than one respect. But the fact remains that all that is real to-day in the Western outlook on life and ethics is directly traceable to the old Roman civilization. As the intellectual and social atmosphere of old Rome was utterly utilitarian and anti-religious—not admittedly, to be sure, but in fact—so is the atmosphere of the modern West. Without having a proof against transcendental religion, and without even admitting the need for such a proof, modern European thought, while tolerating and sometimes even

emphasizing religion as a social convention, generally leaves transcendental ethics out of the range of practical consideration. The Western civilization does not strictly deny God, but it has simply no room and no use for God in its present intellectual system. It has made a virtue out of an intellectual difficulty of man, *i. e.* his inability to grasp the totality of life. Thus the modern European is likely to attribute practical importance only to such ideas as lie within the scope of empiric sciences or, at least, are expected to influence the social relations of men in a tangible way. As the question of the existence of God falls neither under the one nor the other category, the European mind is *a-priori* inclined to exclude God out of the sphere of practical considerations.

The question arises: how is such an attitude compatible with the Christian way of thinking? Is not Christianity, which is supposed to be the spiritual framework of the Western civilization, a faith based on transcendental ethics in a similar way as Islam? Of course, it is. But then, there can be no greater error than to consider the modern Western civilization as an outcome of Christianity. The real intellectual fundamentals of the modern West are to be found in the old Roman conception of life as a purely utilitarian proposition without any

transcendental outlook. It can be expressed as follows: "As we don't know anything definite—*i. e.* by means of scientific experiments and calculations—about the origin of human life and its destinies after the bodily death, so it is better to concentrate all our energies on the development of our material and intellectual possibilities, without allowing ourselves to be hampered by transcendental ethics and moral postulates based on presumptions which defy scientific proof." There can be no doubt that this attitude, so characteristic of the modern Western civilization, is as unacceptable for the Christian religious thought as it is for Islam or any other religion, because it is irreligious in its very essence. To ascribe, therefore, the practical achievements of the modern Western civilization to the Christian teachings, is almost ridiculous.

Christianity has contributed very little to the powerful scientific and material development in which the present civilization of the West excels all others. Indeed, those achievements emerged out of Europe's age-long intellectual fight against the Christian Church and its outlook on life.

Through long centuries the spirit of Europe was oppressed by a religious system embodying the contempt of life and nature. The note of renunciation which pervades the Gospels from one end to

to the other, the passive submission to wrong inflicted, the repudiation of sex as being based on the fall of Adam and Eve in the Paradise, the hereditary sin, Atonement through Christ's crucifixion,—all these ideas lead to an interpretation of human life not as a positive stage, but almost as a necessary evil, as an educative obstacle on the path of spiritual progress. It is clear that such a belief does not favour energetic endeavours concerning worldly knowledge and the improvement of the earthly conditions of life. And, indeed, for a very long time the intellect of Europe was subdued by this sinister conception of the human existence. During the Middle Ages, when the Church was omnipotent there, Europe had no vitality whatsoever in the realm of scientific research, it lost even all real connexion with the philosophic achievements of Rome and Greece out of which European culture had once originated. The intellect revolted more than once ; but it was beaten down by the Church again and again. The history of the Middle Ages is full of that bitter struggle between the genius of Europe and the spirit of the Church.

The liberation of the European mind from the intellectual bondage to which the Christian Church had subjugated it fell in the time of the Renaissance

and was due, to a very large extent, to the new cultural impulses which the *Arabs* were then transmitting to the West.

Whatever was best in the culture of old Greece and the later Hellenistic period the Arabs had revived in their learning and improved upon in the centuries that followed the establishment of the early Islamic Empire. I do not say that the absorption of Hellenistic thought was an undisputed benefit for the Arabs, and the Muslims at large,—because it was not. But for all the difficulties which this revived Hellenistic culture may have caused to the development of Muslims in a truly Islamic sense, it acted, through the Arabs, as an immense stimulus for Europe. The Middle Ages had laid waste Europe's productive forces. Sciences were stagnant, superstition reigned supreme, the social life was primitive and crude to an extent hardly conceivable to-day. At that point the cultural influence of the Islamic world—at first through the adventure of the Crusades in the East and the brilliant universities of Muslim Spain in the West, and later on through the growing commercial relations established by the republics of Genoa and Venice—began to hammer at the bolted doors of the European civilization. Before the dazzled eyes of the European scholars and thinkers another civilization appeared--

refined, progressive, full of passionate life and in possession of cultural treasures which were long ago lost and forgotten in Europe. But what the Arabs did was far more than a mere revival of old Greece. They created an entirely new scientific world of their own, they found and developed new avenues of research. All this they communicated through different channels to the Western World. It is not too much to say that the modern scientific age in which we are living at present was not inaugurated in the cities of Christian Europe, but in the Islamic centres of Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo and Cordova.

The effect of these influences on Europe was tremendous. With the approach of the Islamic civilization a new intellectual light dawned on the skies of the West and infused it with a fresh life and thirst for progress. It is no more than a just appreciation of its value that Europe termed the period of regeneration which resulted out of the invigorating contact with the Islamic culture, the *Renaissance*—i. e. the “re-birth.” It was a re-birth, in fact, and nothing less.

The rejuvenating currents coming from the Islamic world enabled the best minds of Europe to fight with new strength against the disastrous supremacy of the Christian Church. In the beginning this contest had the outward appearance of reform move-

ments which sprang up, almost simultaneously, in different European countries, with the object of adapting the Christian way of thinking to the new exigencies of life. They were sound and reasonable in a way, and, if they had met with real spiritual success, they might have produced a certain reconciliation between science and religious thought in Europe. But, as it happened, the wrong caused by the Church of the Middle Ages was already too far-reaching to be repaired by mere reforms which, moreover, quickly degenerated into purely political struggles between interested groups. As the decades and the centuries advanced the spiritual hold of the Christian religious thought grew weaker and weaker, and in the 18th century the predominance of the Church was definitely swept overboard by the French Revolution.

At that time again it appeared as if a new spiritual civilization, freed from the tyrannical gloom of the scholastical theology of the Middle Ages, had a chance of growth in Europe. In fact, at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century we encounter some of the best and spiritually most powerful European personalities in the domain of philosophy, literature and music. But unfortunately this new spiritual, intuitive conception of life was and remained restricted to those few individuals



The great European masses, after having been imprisoned for such a long time in religious dogmas which had no connexion with the natural endeavours of man, could not, and would not, once those chains were broken, find their way back to a religious orientation so soon. In addition to this, the beginning of the industrial era with the glamour of its material progress directed men towards new interests and thus contributed to the subsequent spiritual vacuum of Europe. In this vacuum the development of the Western civilization took a tragic turn—tragic from the viewpoint of an observer who regards religion as the strongest reality in human life. Freed from its former serfdom towards Christianity, the European mind in the 19th and 20th centuries overstepped the limit and settled itself, by degrees, into a decided antagonism against *any* form of spiritual claim upon man. Out of the subconscious fear of being overwhelmed once more by forces claiming spiritual authority, Europe has become the champion of everything anti-religious in principle and action. It has returned to its Roman inheritance.

One cannot, therefore, be blamed for the contention that it was not the potential superiority of the Christian religion over other creeds which enabled the West to reach its brilliant material achievements, because those achievements are due to the

opposition of Europe's intellectual forces against the very principles of the Christian Church. The materialist conception of life is Europe's revenge on Christian spirituality which went astray from the natural truth of life.

It is not within our scope to go deeper into the private relations between Christianity and the modern Western civilization. I have only tried to show two of the reasons, perhaps the chief reasons, why that civilization is so thoroughly anti-religious in its conceptions and methods: the one is the inheritance of the Roman civilization with its utterly materialistic attitude as regards human life and its inherent value; and the other is the revolt of the human nature against the Christian world-contempt and its suppression of natural desires and legitimate endeavours of man. This revolt was entirely successful—so successful that the various Christian sects and churches were gradually compelled to adjust some of their doctrines to the changed social and intellectual conditions in Europe. Instead of influencing and shaping the social life of its adherents, as is the primary duty of religion, Christianity has long since resigned to the rôle of a tolerated convention and a garb for political enterprises. For the masses it has to-day only a formal meaning, as was the case with the gods of ancient

Rome which were neither allowed nor supposed to exert any real influence upon society. No doubt there are still many individuals in the West who feel and think in a religious way and make the most desperate efforts to reconcile their beliefs with the spirit of their civilization,—but they are exceptions only. The average European—he may be a Democrat or a Fascist, a Capitalist or a Bolshevist, a manual worker or an intellectual—knows only one positive “religion,” and that is the worship of material progress, the belief that there is no other goal in life than to make that very life continually easier and, as the current expression goes, “independent of Nature.” The temples of this “religion” are the gigantic factories, cinemas, chemical laboratories, dancing halls, hydro-electric works; and its priests are bankers, engineers, film-stars, industrial barons, record-airmen. The unavoidable result of this craving after power and pleasure is the creation of hostile groups armed to the teeth and determined to destroy each other whenever and wherever their respective interests come to a clash. And on the cultural side the result is the creation of a human type whose morality is confined to the question of practical utility alone, and whose highest criterion between good and evil is the material success.

In the profound transformation the social life of the West is undergoing at present, that new, utilitarian morality becomes daily more and more visible. All such virtues as have a direct bearing upon the material welfare of society—as for example technical efficiency, patriotism, nationalist group sense—are being exalted and sometimes absurdly exaggerated in their value; while those virtues which, up till now, have been valued from a purely ethical point of view, as, for example, filial love or sexual fidelity, rapidly lose their importance, because they do not confer a tangible, material benefit upon society. The age in which the insistence on strong family bonds was decisive for the well-being of the group or the clan is being superseded, in the modern West, by an age of collective organization under far wider headings. And in a society which is essentially technological and is being organized, at a rapidly increasing rate, on purely mechanical lines the behaviour of an individual son towards his father is of no great social importance, so long as those individuals behave within the limits of general decency imposed by the society on the intercourse of its members. Consequently, the European father daily loses more and more authority over his son, and the son loses respect for his father. Their mutual relations are being quickly overruled and—for all

practical purposes—annihilated by a mechanized society which has a tendency to abolish the privileges of one individual over another, and—in the logical development of this idea—also the privileges created by family relationship.

Parallel to this goes the progressive dissolution of the so-called “old sexual morality.” Sexual fidelity and discipline are quickly becoming a thing of the past in the modern West, because they were enforced by ethics alone: and ethical considerations have no tangible, immediate influence on the material well-being of society. But material welfare alone is a thing that matters in the West. So the place of the “old”, ethical morality endorsed by religion is being taken over by the “new” Western morality which proclaims the unrestricted individual freedom of the human body. Ethical discipline and control of sexual relations are rapidly losing their importance. The only possible restriction in the future will be, at the best, derived from considerations of demography and eugenics.

It is not without interest to observe how both these changes, the one concerning the relations between children and parents, and the other concerning the relations between the sexes, have been brought to their logical climax in Soviet Russia, which, on its cultural side, does not represent a

development *essentially* different from the rest of the Western World. On the contrary, it seems that the Bolshevik experiment is nothing else but the culmination and the beginning of the fulfilment of those decidedly anti-religious and—ultimately—anti-spiritual tendencies of the modern Western civilization. It even might be that the present sharp antagonism between the Capitalistic West and Bolshevism is, at its root, only due to the different pace at which those essentially parallel movements are progressing towards their ultimate goal. Their inner similarity, no doubt, will become more and more pronounced in future; but even now it is visible in the fundamental tendency of both the Western Capitalism and Bolshevism, to surrender the spiritual individuality of man and his ethical morality to the purely material requirements of a collective machinery called "society".

The only possible conclusion is, that a civilization of this kind must be a deadly poison for any culture based on religious values. Our original question; whether it is possible to adapt the Islamic way of thinking and living to the exigencies of the Western civilization, and vice versa, must be answered in the negative. In Islam, the first and foremost goal is the inner, moral progress of man, and therefore the ethical considerations overrule the purely utilitarian. In the modern Western civilization the

situation is just reversed. The consideration of material utility dominates all manifestations of human activity, and ethics are being relegated to an obscure background of life and condemned to a merely theoretical existence without the slightest power to influence the human community. Their very existence, under such circumstances, is an hypocrisy; and therefore the intellectually decent among the modern European thinkers are subjectively justified if, in their speculations on the social destinies of the Western civilization, they avoid any allusion to transcendental ethics. With the less decent—that is with those who are less clearly defined in their moral attitude—the conception of transcendental ethics survives as an irrational factor of thought, much in the same way as the mathematician is obliged to operate with certain “irrational” numbers which represent nothing tangible in themselves, but are occasionally required to bridge over the gaps of imagination due to the structural limitations of the human mind.

Such an evasive attitude towards ethics is certainly incompatible with a religious orientation; and therefore the very fundamentals of the modern Western civilization are incompatible with Islam. This should in no way exclude the possibility of Muslims receiving certain impulses, in the domain

of exact and applied sciences, from the West. But their cultural relations should begin and end at that point. To go further and to imitate the Western civilization in its spirit, its mode of life and its social organization is impossible without dealing a fatal blow to the very existence of Islam as a theocratic polity and a practical religion.



### III

## UNDER THE SHADE OF THE CRUSADES

QUITE apart from the spiritual incompatibility there is one reason more why Muslims should avoid to imitate the Western civilization: its historical experiences are deeply tinged by a strange animosity against Islam.

To some extent this also is an inheritance from Europe's Greek and Roman past. The Greeks and the Romans regarded only themselves as "civilized", while everything foreign, and particularly everything living to the East of the the Mediterranean Sea, bore the label "barbarian". Since that time the Europeans believe that their superiority over the rest of creation is a matter of fact, and the more or less pronounced contempt of non-European races and nations is one of the standing features of the Western civilization.

This alone, however, is not enough to explain its feelings as regards Islam. Here, and here alone, the European attitude is not one of indifferent dislike as in the case of all other foreign religions and cultures: it is one of a deeprooted and almost fanatical aversion. It is not only intellectual, but bears an intensely emotional tint. Europe may not accept the doctrines of Buddhist or Hindu philosophy, but it will always preserve a balanced, reflective attitude of mind regarding those systems. As soon, however, as it turns towards Islam the balance is disturbed and an emotional bias creeps in. Even the most eminent of the European orientalists have made themselves guilty of an unscientific partiality in their writings on Islam. In their investigations it almost appears as if Islam could not be treated as a mere object of scientific research, but as an accused standing before his judges. Some of the orientalists play the rôle of a public prosecutor bent on securing a conviction; others are like a counsel for the defence who, being personally convinced that his client is guilty, cannot but half-heartedly plead for "mitigating circumstances". All in all the technique of the deductions and conclusions adopted by most of the European orientalists reminds of the proceedings of those famous Courts of Inquisition set up by the Catholic Church against its opponents in the Middle

Ages: that is to say, they hardly ever investigate historical facts independently, but start, almost in every case, from a foregone conclusion dictated by prejudice. They select the witnesses according to the conclusion they intend to reach a-priori. Where an arbitrary selection of witnesses is impossible, they cut parts of the evidence of the available ones out of the context, or they interpret their statements in the spirit of an unscientific malevolence, without attributing any weight to the representations of the case by the other party, that is, the Muslims themselves.

The result of such a procedure is the strangely distorted picture of Islam and things Islamic that faces us in the orientalist literature of Europe. It is not confined to a particular country: it is to be found in England and in Germany, in Russia and in France, in Italy and in Holland, in short—wherever European orientalists turn their eyes on Islam. They seem to be tickled by a sense of malevolent pleasure whenever an occasion—real or imaginary—arises for an adverse criticism of Islam. And as those European orientalists are not a special race for themselves, but only exponents of their civilization and their social surroundings, we necessarily must conclude that the European mind, as a whole, is for some reason or

other undoubtedly prejudiced against Islam as religion and culture. The one reason may be due to the antique inheritance which divides the world into "Europeans" and "barbarians"; and the other reason, more directly connected with Islam, may be easily traced by a retrospective glance upon the history of the Middle Ages.

The first great clash between united Europe on the one side and Islam on the other, namely, the *Crusades*, coincided with the very beginning of the European civilization. At that time this civilization, still in alliance with the Church, had just begun to see its own way after the dark centuries which had followed the decay of Rome. Its literature just then passed through a new blossoming spring. The fine arts were slowly awakening from the lethargy caused by the warlike migrations of the Goths, Huns and Avars. Europe had just emerged out of the crude, pre-cultural conditions of the early Middle Ages; it had just acquired a new cultural self-consciousness and, along with it, an increased sensitiveness. And it was exactly at that extremely critical period that the Crusades brought it into a hostile contact with the World of Islam. There had been, to be sure, other fights between Muslims and Europeans before the age of the Crusades: the Arab conquests of Sicily and Spain and their

attack upon Southern France. But those fights happened before Europe's awakening into its new cultural consciousness, and therefore they bore in their time, at least from the European point of view, still the character of a local issue and were not yet understood in all their importance. It were the Crusades, first and foremost, that decided the European attitude towards Islam for many centuries to come. The Crusades were decisive because they fell in the period of Europe's childhood, a period when its peculiar cultural traits were reasserting themselves for the first time and were still in the process of moulding. Like in individuals, so also in nations the violent impressions of an early childhood persevere, consciously or subconsciously, throughout the later life. They are so deeply embossed that they can be only with difficulty, and seldom entirely, removed by the intellectual experiences of the later, more reflective and less emotional age. So it was with the Crusades. They produced one of the deepest and most permanent impressions on the mass psychology of Europe. The universal enthusiasm they aroused in their time can be compared with nothing Europe had experienced ever before and with hardly anything that came afterwards. A wave of intoxication swept over the whole continent, an elation which overstepped, for some time at least,

the barriers between states and nations and classes. It was then for the first time in history that Europe conceived itself as a *unity*—and it was a unity against the World of Islam. We even can say, without indulging in undue exaggerations, that modern Europe was born out of the spirit of the Crusades. Before that time there existed Anglo-Saxons and Germans, French and Normans, Italians and Danes, etc.; but during the Crusades the new conception of the “Western Civilization”, a cause common to all European nations alike, was created: and it was the antagonism against Islam that stood as godfather behind this new creation....

It is one of the great ironies of history, that this first act of collective consciousness, so to say the constitution, of the Western World was due to impulses entirely and unreservedly backed by the Christian Church, while the subsequent achievements of the West have become possible only by an intellectual revolt against almost everything that Church stood and stands for. It is a tragic development, both from the viewpoint of the Christian Church and the viewpoint of Islam. Tragic for the Church, because it has lost, after such a startling beginning, its hold over the minds of Europe. And tragic for Islam, because it had to bear the fire of

the Crusades, in many form and disguises, through long centuries afterwards.

Out of the unspeakable cruelties, the destruction and the debasement which the pious Knights of the Cross conferred upon the lands of Islam they conquered and subsequently lost, grew the poisonous seed of that age-long animosity which for such a long time has embittered the relations between East and West. Otherwise, there was no inherent necessity for such a feeling. Even if the Islamic and the Western civilizations are, as we believe, entirely different in their spiritual fundamentals and their social organization, they surely should be able to tolerate each other and live side by side in a friendly intercourse. This possibility was given not only in theory but in fact. On the Islamic side there always existed a sincere wish for mutual tolerance and respect. When the Caliph Harun al-Rashid sent his embassy to the Emperor Charlemagne, he was prompted by that desire alone, and not by a possibility to profit materially by a friendship with the Franks. Europe was culturally too primitive at that time to appreciate this opportunity to its full extent, but it certainly showed no dislike for it. Later on, suddenly, the Crusades appeared on the horizon and destroyed the relations between Islam and the West. Not because they meant war : so many wars between

nations have been waged and subsequently forgotten in the course of human history, and so many animosities have turned into friendship. The evil which the Crusades caused was not restricted to the clang of weapons; it was, first and foremost, an intellectual evil. It consisted in poisoning the European mind against Islam, in the misrepresentation of its teachings and ideals before the ignorant masses of the West. It was then that the ridiculous notion of Islam as a religion of sensualism and brutal violence, of an observance of formalities instead of a purification of heart, entered the mind of Europe and stuck fast; and it was then for the first time, that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was called in Europe "Mahound".

The seed of hatred was sown. The enthusiasm of the Crusades had soon its sequels elsewhere in Europe: it encouraged the Christian nation of Spain to fight for the recovery of that country from the "yoke of the heathens." The breakdown of the Arab rule was not at once completed. It took centuries. But precisely for the reason of the long duration of this fight the anti-Islamic feeling of Europe deepened and grew to permanency. It resulted in the extermination of the Muslim element in Spain after the most ferocious and merciless persecution the world had ever witnessed and was echoed by



the rejoicings of all Europe, though the after-effect of that victory was the destruction of science and culture and its supersession by medieval ignorance and crudeness.

But before the echo of the events in Spain had time to die away, a third event of great importance marred the relations between the Western World and Islam: the fall of Constantinople into the hands of the Turks. In the eyes of Europe there was still something of the old Greek and Roman glamour left over Byzantium, and it was always regarded as Europe's bulwark against the "barbarians" of Asia. With its ultimate fall the gateway of Europe was thrown open to a Muslim flood. In the warlike centuries that followed, the hostility of Europe against Islam became a matter not only of cultural, but also of political importance; and this contributed to its intensity.

With all this, Europe considerably profited by these conflicts. The Renaissance, the revival of European arts and sciences with its extensive borrowing from Islamic, mainly Arabic, sources, was largely due to the martial contact between East and West. Europe gained by it, in the domain of culture, far more than the World of Islam ever did; but it never acknowledged its indebtedness through a diminution of its hatred of Islam. On the contrary,

that hatred grew with the progress of time and hardened into a matter-of-fact. It overshadowed the popular feeling whenever the word "Muslim" was mentioned, it entered the realm of popular proverbs, it was hammered into the heart of every European, man and woman. And what is most remarkable, it outlived all cultural changes. The time of the Reformation came, when religious factions divided Europe and sect stood in arms against sect: but the hatred of Islam was common to all of them. A time came when religious feeling began to vanish in Europe: but the hatred of Islam remained. It is a most characteristic fact that the French philosopher and poet, Voltaire, one of the most vigorous enemies of Christianity and its Church in the 18th century, was at the same time a fanatical hater of Islam and its Prophet. Some decades later a time came when learned men in the West began to study foreign cultures and to approach them sympathetically: but in the case of Islam the traditional scorn crept as an irrational bias into their scientific investigation, and the cultural gulf which history unfortunately had laid between Europe and the World of Islam remained unbridged. The contempt of Islam had become part and parcel of the European thought. It is true, that the first orientalists in modern times

slightest evidence that this could happen within the conceivable future. So far as the Western civilization is concerned, this possibly can happen only after a series of terrible social and mental cataclysms which would shatter the present cultural self-conceit of Europe and change its mentality so thoroughly as to make it apt and ready to accept a religious explanation of life. To-day the Western World is still completely lost in the adoration of its material achievements and in the belief that comfort, and comfort alone, is the goal worth striving for. Its materialism, its denunciation of a religious orientation of thought are certainly increasing in force, and not decreasing, as some optimistic Muslim observers suppose.

It has been said that the modern science begins to admit the existence of a uniform creative power behind the visible framework of Nature; and this, those optimists allege, is the beginning of a new religious conscience in the West. But such a statement only betrays a misunderstanding of European scientific thought. No serious scientist can or ever could deny the probability of the universe being due, in its origin, to some principal, dynamic cause. The question, however, is, and always was, as to the *qualities* which those representatives of science are ready to attribute to

that "cause." All transcendental religious systems assert that it is a power possessing absolute consciousness and insight, a power which creates and rules the universe according to some plan and purpose, without being limited itself by any laws. In one word : it is God. But the modern science as such is neither prepared nor inclined to go so far (in fact, this is not the domain of science) and leaves the question of consciousness and independence—in other words, the divinity—of that creative power quite open. Its attitude is one of "it might be, but I don't know and have no scientific means to know." In future this philosophy might result in some sort of a pantheistic agnosticism in which soul and matter, purpose and existence, creator and created are one and the same. It is difficult to admit that such a belief could be regarded as a step forward towards the positive, Islamic conception of God. It is not a farewell to materialism, but simply its elevation to a higher, more refined intellectual level.

Europe was never farther from Islam than it is to-day. Its active hostility against our religion may be on the decline ; this, however, is not due to an appreciation of the Islamic teachings, but to the growing cultural weakness and disintegration of the Islamic World. The West was once

afraid of Islam, and their apprehension forced them to adopt an inimical attitude towards everything that had Islamic colour, even in purely spiritual and social matters. But in a time when Islam has lost most of its importance as a factor opposed to European interests, it is quite natural that with the diminished fear Europe should also lose some of the original intensity of its anti-Islamic feelings. If those feelings have become less pronounced and active, it does not entitle us to the conclusion that the West has inwardly come nearer to Islam; it only indicates its growing indifference towards Islam.

By no means the Western civilization has changed its peculiar mental attitude. It is at present as strongly opposed to a religious conception of life as it was ever before; and, as has been said, there is no convincing evidence that a change is likely to take place in near future. The existence of Islamic missions in the West and the fact that some Europeans and Americans have embraced Islam (in most cases without fully understanding its teachings) is no argument at all. In a period in which materialism is triumphant on the whole line it is quite natural that a few individuals here and there, who have still a longing for spiritual regeneration, greedily listen to any creed based on

religious conceptions. In this respect the Islamic missions do not stand alone in the West. There are numberless Christian mystical sects with "revivalist" tendencies, there is the fairly strong Theosophic movement, there are Buddhist temples and missions in various European capitals. The Buddhist mission in Berlin, for example, has a far larger number of converts to show than that of the converts to Islam all over Germany. With the same arguments as the Muslim missions claim for themselves, those Buddhist missions could claim that Europe is "coming nearer" to Buddhism. In both cases the assertion is ridiculous. The conversion of a few individuals to Buddhism or Islam does not in the least prove that any of the two creeds has really begun to influence Western life on a considerable scale. One could go even further and say, that none of those missions has been able to arouse more than a very moderate curiosity, mainly due to the fascination which an "exotic" creed exerts upon the minds of romantically inclined people. There certainly are exceptions, and some of the converts may be earnest seekers after truth; but exceptions are not enough to change the aspect of a civilization. On the other hand, if we compare with it the number of people who are daily flocking into the ranks of purely materialistic social creeds,

as Marxism or Fascism, we are able to fully appreciate the trend of the modern Western civilization.

It may be, as has been pointed out before, that the growing social and 'economical unrest and possibly also a new World War of hitherto unknown dimensions and scientific terrors will lead the materialist self-conceit of the Western civilization in such a gruesome way *ad absurdum*, that its minds will begin once more, in humbleness and earnest, the search after spiritual truth: and then a successful preaching of Islam in the West might be possible. But such a change is still hidden behind the horizon of the future. It is a dangerous and self-deceiving optimism, therefore, if Muslims talk of Islamic influences as being on their way to conquer the spirit of Europe. Such a talk is in reality nothing but the old Mahdi-belief in a "rationalist" disguise, the belief in a power that would suddenly appear and make the tottering structure of Islam triumphant on earth. This belief is dangerous, because it is pleasant and easy, and because it tends to swindle ourselves away from the realization of the fact that we are culturally nowhere, while the Western influence is most potent in the Muslim World to-day; that we are

sleeping, while the Western civilization undermines and destroys the Islamic society everywhere.

We are dreaming of the Light of Islam spreading over the lands far away: while the youth of Islam, in our immediate surroundings, is deserting our cause and our hope.

Must it be so?



## IV

# THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION

It must be so, as long as we continue to look towards the Western civilization as the only force that could regenerate the stagnant civilization of Islam. We will thus continue to diminish our self-confidence and, indirectly, to support the Western assertion that Islam is a "spent force".

In the previous chapters the reasons have been given for the opinion that Islam and the Western civilization, being built on diametrically opposed conceptions of life, are not compatible with each other. This being so, how could we expect that the education of Muslim youth on Western lines, an education based entirely on European cultural experiences and exigencies, should remain free from anti-Islamic influences?

We are not justified to expect this. Except in rare cases, where a particularly brilliant mind may

triumph over the educational matter, the Western education of Muslim youth is bound to undermine their will to believe, their will to regard themselves as representatives of the peculiar theocratic civilization of Islam. There can be no doubt whatever that the religious belief is rapidly losing ground among the "intelligentsia" educated on Western lines. This does not mean, that Islam has preserved its integrity as a practical religion among the non-educated classes, but there anyhow we generally find a far greater sentimental response to the call of Islam—in the primitive way they understand it—than among the westernized "intelligentsia". The cause of such an estrangement is not that the Western science with which they have been fed has been able to furnish any reasonable argument against the truth of religious teaching, but that the intellectual atmosphere of the Western civilization is so intensely anti-religious that it imposes itself as a dead weight upon the religious potentialities of the young Muslim generation.

Religious belief and unbelief are very rarely a matter of argument alone. In some cases the one or the other is gained by way of intuition or, let us say, insight. But mostly it is communicated to man by his cultural surroundings. Think of a child who is systematically trained, since his earliest days, to

hear perfectly rendered musical tunes. His ear grows accustomed to discern tone, rhythm and harmony; and in his later age he will be able, if not to produce and to render, at least to understand the most difficult music. But a child who during the whole of his early life never heard anything resembling music, would find it hard afterwards to appreciate even its elements. It is the same with religious training. As there certainly are some individuals to whom nature has completely denied an "ear" for music, so there are also individuals who are perfectly "deaf" to the voice of religion. But for the overwhelming number of normal human beings the alternative between religious belief and unbelief is decided by the atmosphere in which they have been brought up. Therefore the Prophet said :

كل مولود يولد على فطرة فإبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه أو يمجسانه

"Every child is born in original purity ; it is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian, or an idol-worshipper."

The term "parents," can logically be extended on the general surroundings by which the early development of the child is determined. One should not hesitate to admit that in the present state of decadence the religious atmosphere in many Muslim houses is of such a low and intellectually degraded type that it often produces, in the growing youth, the first incentive to turn one's back on religion.

This surely may be so; but in the case of the education of young Muslims on Western lines the effect not only may be, but most probably will be, an anti-religious attitude in the later life.

But then, the great question comes: what shall be our attitude towards modern learning?

A protest against Western education of Muslims does not mean in the least that Islam is opposed to education as such. This allegation of our opponents has neither a theological nor a historical foundation. The Holy Quran is full of expressions like: **لعلكم تعقلون** "that you may become wise", **لعلكم تتفكرون** "that you may meditate", **لعلكم تشعرون** "that you may know". And it is said at the beginning of the Holy Book: .

**وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا**

"And He (God) taught Adam all the names—"

and in the following verses is expressed, that owing to the knowledge of those "names" man is, in a certain respect, superior even to the angels. And what are the "names"? They are a symbolical expression for the power to define terms, the power of articulated thinking which is peculiar to the human being, and which enables him, in the words of the Quran, to be God's vice-gerent on earth. In order to make a systematic use of his thinking man

must learn; and therefore the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said :

طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم و مسلمة

“The quest of knowledge is a sacred duty of every Muslim man and woman.”

But it is not even necessary to quote verses from the Quran or sayings of the Prophet in defence of the Islamic attitude towards learning. History proves beyond any possibility of doubt that no religion ever has given such a stimulus to scientific progress as Islam did. The encouragement which learning and scientific research received from the Islamic theology resulted in the splendid cultural achievements in the days of the Umayyads and Abbassides and the Arab rule in Spain. Europe knows this best, for its own culture owes to Islam nothing less than the Renaissance after centuries of darkness. This is not said in order that we may pride ourselves with those glorious memories, in a time when the Islamic world has forsaken its own tradition and reverted into blindness and intellectual poverty. We have no right, in our present misery, to boast of past glories. But we must realize that it was the negligence of Muslims, and not any deficiency in the Islamic teachings, which caused the present decay.

Islam never has been a barrier to progress and science. It appreciates the intellectual activities of man to such a degree as to place him above the angels. No other religion went so far in asserting the predominance of reason and, consequently, of learning, above all other manifestations of life. If we conform ourselves to the principles of this religion we cannot wish to eliminate modern learning out of our life. We wish to learn and to progress and to become scientifically and economically as efficient as the Western nations are. But the one thing the Muslims cannot wish is, to see with Western eyes, to think in Western thoughts: they cannot wish, if they desire to remain Muslims, to exchange the spiritual civilization of Islam for the materialist experiments of Europe.

Knowledge itself is neither Western nor Eastern; it is universal in the same sense as facts are universal. But the angle of vision from which they are regarded and presented varies with the cultural temperament of the nations. Biology as such, or physics, or botany, are neither materialistic nor spiritual in their purpose; they are concerned with the observation, collection and definition of facts and conceivable rules. But the inductive conclusions we derive from these sciences about the general aspects of life, that is, the philosophy of sciences, is never based on facts

and observations alone, but is influenced, to a very large extent, by our pre-existing temperamental or intuitive attitude towards life and its problems. The great German philosopher Kant remarks: "It seems surprising at first, but is none the less certain, that our reason does not *draw* its conclusions from Nature, but *prescribes* them to it." It is the subjective angle of vision that matters here and changes the aspect of the object. Thus sciences, which are neither materialistic nor spiritual in themselves, may be turned into the one or the other aspect according to our own mental position. The mental position of the West is, as stated before, notwithstanding its highly refined intellectualism, clearly materialistic and, therefore, anti-religious in its conceptions and fundamental presumptions; and so must be their educational system as a whole. To repeat once more: it is not the study of modern, empiric sciences which is detrimental to the cultural reality of Islam, but the spirit of the Western civilization through which we approach those sciences.

It is very unfortunate that our own age-long indifference and negligence, so far as scientific research is concerned, have made us entirely dependent on the European presentation of learning. If we always had followed that principle of Islam which

enjoins the duty of learning and research upon every Muslim, we would not have to look to-day for modern sciences towards Europe in the same way as the man dying of thirst in the desert looks towards the mirage of water on the horizon. But as the Muslims had neglected their own possibilities for a long time, they have fallen into ignorance and material poverty, while Europe took a mighty step forward. It will take long to bridge over the difference. Till then we naturally will be obliged to accept the modern sciences through the educational medium of Europe. But this only means that we have to accept the scientific *matter* and *method*, and nothing else. In other words, we should not hesitate to study the so-called exact sciences along the Western lines, but without conceding to their philosophy any part in the education of Muslim youth. Of course, one could say that at present many of the exact sciences, for example atomic physics, have reached a degree beyond a purely empiric investigation, and so they necessarily must intrude upon philosophic domains; and that it is extremely difficult, in many cases, to draw a distinct line between empiric science and speculative philosophy. This is true. But, on the other hand, this exactly is the point where the Islamic culture will have to re-assert itself. It will be the duty and the opportunity of Muslim scientists, when



they will have reached those border lines of scientific investigation, to apply their forces of speculative reasoning independent of Western philosophic theories. Out of their own—Islamic—mental attitude they probably will come to metaphysical conclusions somewhat different from those of the modern Western scientists.

But whatever future may bring, it is decidedly possible, even to-day, to study and to teach sciences without a slavish submission to the mental attitude of the West. The thing the World of Islam urgently needs to-day is not a new philosophical outlook, but only an up-to-date scientific and technical equipment. If I were to make proposals to an ideal Educational Board, governed by Islamic considerations alone, I would urge that of all intellectual achievements of the West only the natural sciences (in the above mentioned, reserved attitude) and mathematics should be taught in Muslim schools, while the tuition of European philosophy, literature, and world-history, as seen from the Western standpoint, should lose the position of primacy which to-day it holds in their curriculum. The position with regard to European philosophy should be clear from the foregoing. And as to European literature, it certainly should not be forbidden to study, but it should be relegated to its proper,

that is, linguistic value. The way it is approached and taught at present in Muslim countries is frankly biased. The boundless exaggeration of its values naturally induces the young and unripe minds to imbibe the spirit of the Western civilization before its negative sides can sufficiently be appreciated. So the ground is prepared not only for a platonic adoration, but also for the practical imitation of the Western civilization which can never go together with the spirit of Islam. The present rôle of the European literature in Muslim schools should be taken over by a reasonable, discriminating tuition of Islamic literature with a view to impress the student with the width and richness of the Islamic culture, and thus to infuse into him a new hope for its future.

If the tuition of European literature, in the form it is prevalent to-day in many Muslim institutions, contributes to the estrangement of young Muslims from Islam, the same in a still larger measure is true of the European interpretation of world-history. In it the old attitude "*Romans versus barbarians*" very distinctly comes to its own. Such a presentation of history has for its unavowed goal to prove that the Western races and their civilization are superior to anything that has or could be produced in this world, and so to

give a sort of moral justification to the Western quest of domination and material power. Since the time of the Romans the European nations are accustomed to regard all difference between East and West from the standpoint of a presumed European "normality". Their intellect works on the presumption that the development of the world can be judged only from the basis of European cultural experiences. Such a narrowed angle of vision necessarily produces a distorted perspective, and the farther the lines of observation recede from the habitual basis of the European outlook, the more difficult it becomes for them to grasp the real appearance and structure of the object in consideration.

Owing to this egocentric attitude of the Europeans their descriptive history of the world was in reality nothing but an enlarged history of the West. The non-European nations were taken into account only so far as their existence and development had any direct influence on the destinies of Europe. But if you depict the history of European nations in great detail and in vivid colours, and you allow only side-glances here and there towards the other parts of the world, then the reader is prone to succumb to the illusion that the greatness of the European achievement in social and intellectual respects is out of all proportion to that of the rest of

the world. Thus it almost appears as if the world were created for the sake of Europe and its civilization alone, and as if all other races and civilizations were to form only a setting for its brilliancy. The only effect such historical training can have upon the minds of young non-European people will always be the feeling of inferiority so far as their own culture, their own historical past and their own future possibilities are concerned. They are systematically trained to disdain their own past and their own future—unless it be a future surrendered to Western ideals.

In order to counteract these evil effects the conscious leaders of Islamic thought should do their utmost to revise the tuition of history in Muslim institutions. This is a difficult task, no doubt, and it will require a thorough overhauling of the historical investigation before a new history of the world, as seen with Muslim eyes, is created. But if this task is difficult, it is none the less possible and, moreover, imperative. Otherwise our young generation will continue to be fed with undercurrents of a contempt for Islam; and the result is a daily deepening inferiority complex.

We believe, and the recent development in the West re-affirms this belief, that the ethics of Islam, its conceptions of social and personal morality, of

justice, of liberty, are infinitely higher, infinitely more perfect than the corresponding conceptions within the Western civilization. Islam has abolished racial hatred and opened the way for human brotherhood and equality; but the Western civilization is still unable to look beyond the narrow horizon of racial and national antagonisms. Islam has never known classes and class-warfare within its society; but the whole of European history, since the days of Greece and Rome till our times, is full of class-struggle and social hatred. Again and again it must be repeated that there is one thing only which a Muslim can learn from the West and profit from, namely, the exact sciences in their pure and applied forms. This necessity for a quest of science from outside should not induce a Muslim to consider the Western civilization as superior to his own—or else he does not understand what Islam stands for. The superiority of one culture or civilization over another does not consist in the possession of a greater amount of material knowledge (although the latter is most desirable), but in its ethical energy, in its greater possibility to explain and to co-ordinate all aspects of human life. And in this respect Islam surpasses every other culture. We have only to follow its rules in order to achieve the utmost human beings are capable of achieving.

But we cannot and must not imitate the Western civilization if we wish to preserve and to revive the values of Islam. The evil which the intellectual influence of that civilization causes in the body of Islam is far greater than the material profit it possibly could confer.

If Muslims have been negligent, in the past, of scientific research, we cannot hope to repair that mistake to-day by an unrestricted acceptance of Western learning. All our scientific backwardness and our poverty stand no comparison whatever with the deadly effect which our blind following of the Western educational structure would have on the religious possibilities of the Muslim World. If we wish to preserve the reality of Islam as a cultural factor we must guard against the intellectual atmosphere of the Western civilization conquering our society and our inclinations. By imitating the manners and the mode of life of the West the Muslims are being gradually forced to adopt the Western outlook. The imitation of outward appearance leads, by degrees, to a corresponding assimilation of the mental disposition.

It is futile to argue, as many of the Muslim "intelligentsia" do, that it is of no spiritual consequence whatever whether we live in this or that way, whether we put on European or Asiatic dress

whether we are conservative in our customs or not. Of course, there is no narrowmindedness in Islam. As has been said in the first chapter, Islam concedes to man a very wide range of possibilities, as long as he does not act in contradiction to religious commands. But quite apart from the fact that many a thing which is an essential part of the Western social structure—as for example the free intercourse of the sexes or the interest on capital as a basis of the economic activity—is unmistakably opposed to the teachings of Islam, the innate character of the Western civilization, as has been shown, definitely precludes a religious orientation in man. And only very superficial people can believe that it is possible to imitate a civilization in its external appearance, without being at the same time affected by its spirit. A civilization is not an empty form only, but a living energy. The moment we begin to accept its form, its inherent currents and dynamic influences set to work in ourselves and mould slowly, imperceptibly our whole mental attitude.

It is in perfect appreciation of this experience that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said :

من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم

“Whoever imitates a people, becomes one of them.”

This well-known Hadith is not only a moral hint,

but also an objective statement which lays down, in a detached way, the inevitability of a circumstantial occurrence.

In this respect it is hardly possible to see a fundamental difference between "important" and "unimportant" aspects of social life. Nothing is unimportant. There can be no greater mistake than to suppose that dress, for example, is something purely external and of no consequence to the intellectual and spiritual Self of man. It is generally the outcome of an age-long development of a people's taste in a particular direction. Its fashion corresponds with the æsthetic conceptions of that people, and with its inclinations. It has been shaped and is being constantly re-shaped according to the changes through which the character and the inclinations of its people are passing. European fashion of to-day, for instance, thoroughly corresponds with the intellectual character of Europe. By wearing European dress the young Muslim unconsciously twists his own intellectual being in such a way that it ultimately fits the new dress. Moreover, in doing so he renounces the cultural possibilities of his own people, he renounces their traditional taste and accepts the livery of intellectual serfdom which a foreign civilization has conferred upon him.



If a Muslim imitates the dress, the manners and the mode of life of Europe, he betrays his preference for the European civilization, whatever else his avowed pretensions be. It is practically impossible that a man should imitate a foreign civilization in its intellectual and æsthetic design, without appreciating its spirit. And it is equally impossible that a man should appreciate the spirit of a civilization which is opposed to a religious orientation—and yet remain a good Muslim.

The tendency to imitate a foreign civilization is the outcome of a feeling of inferiority. This, and nothing else, is the matter with the Muslims who imitate the Western civilization. They contrast its power and technical skill and brilliant surface with the sad misery of the World of Islam : and they begin to believe that there is no way in our times but the Western way. To blame Islam for our own shortcomings is the fashion of the day. At the best, our so-called intellectuals adopt an apologetic attitude and try to convince themselves and others that Islam can well assimilate the spirit of the Western civilization.

In order to achieve the regeneration of Islam, the Muslims must, before the adoption of any measures of reform, free themselves entirely from the spirit of apology for their religion. A Muslim

must live with his head lifted high. He must realize that he is distinct and different from the rest of the world, and he must be immensely *proud* of his being so. He must endeavour to preserve this difference as a precious quality, and pronounce it boldly to the world, instead of apologizing for it and trying to merge into other cultural circles. This does not mean that the Muslims should seclude themselves from the voices coming from without. One may always receive new, positive influences from a foreign civilization without necessarily destroying his own. The best example of this kind was the European Renaissance. There we have seen how readily Europe accepted the Arab influences in the matter and method of learning. But it never imitated the outward appearance and the spirit of the Arabic culture, it never sacrificed its own intellectual and æsthetic independence. It has used the Arab influences only as a fertilizer upon its own soil, just as the Arabs had used the Hellenistic influences in their time. The result in both cases was a strong, new growth of an indigenous civilization, full of self-confidence and pride in itself. No civilization can prosper, or even exist, after having lost this pride and the connexion with its own past.

But the World of Islam, with its growing tendency to imitate Europe and to assimilate Western ideas and ideals, is gradually cutting away the bonds which link it with its past, and therefore it is losing hold not only on its cultural but also on its spiritual ground. It resembles a tree that was strong as long as it was deeply rooted in the soil. But the mountain torrent of the Western civilization has washed those roots bare: and the tree slowly decays for want of nourishment. Its leaves fall, its branches wither away. At the end the trunk itself stands in danger of collapsing to the ground.

## V

### HADIS AND SUNNAH

WESTERN civilization, then, cannot be the right means of reviving the Islamic World out of the mental and social stupor caused by the degeneration of a practical religion into a mere custom without life and moral urge in it. But where else should the Muslims look for the spiritual and intellectual impetus so badly needed in these days? The answer is as simple as the question; indeed, it is already contained in the question. Islam, as has been pointed out many times before, is not only a "belief of heart", but, along with it, a very clearly defined programme of individual and social life. It can be destroyed by assimilating a foreign culture which has essentially different moral foundations. Equally, it can be regenerated the moment it is brought back to its own reality and given the

value of a factor determining and shaping our personal and social existence in all its aspects.

Under the impact of new ideas and conflicting cultural currents, so characteristic of the period in which we are living, Islam can no longer afford to remain an empty form. Its magic sleep of centuries is broken; it has to rise or to die. The problem facing the Muslims to-day is the problem of the traveller who has reached a point where his road bifurcates. He can remain standing where he is; but that would mean death of starvation. He can choose the road bearing the sign "Towards the Western Civilization"; but then, he would have to say good-bye to his past for ever. Or he can choose the other one over which there is written: "Towards the Reality of Islam". It is this road alone which can appeal to those who believe in their past and in the possibility of its transformation into a living future.

Many proposals of reform have been brought forward during the last decades, and many spiritual doctors have tried to devise a patent medicine for the sick body of Islam. But, till now, all was in vain, because all those clever doctors—at least those who get a hearing to-day—have forgotten to prescribe along with their medicines and tonics and elixirs the natural *diet* on

which the early development of the patient was based. This diet, the only one which the body of Islam, sound or sick, can positively accept and assimilate into its organism, is the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The Sunnah is the key to the understanding of the Islamic rise more than thirteen centuries ago; and why should it not be a key to the understanding of our present degeneration? The observance of Sunnah is identical with Islamic existence and progress. The neglect of Sunnah is identical with decomposition and decay of Islam. The Sunnah was the iron framework of the House of Islam; and if you take away the framework out of a building, can you wonder that it breaks down like a house of cards?

This simple truth, almost unanimously accepted by all learned men throughout the Islamic history, is—we know it well—most unpopular to-day for reasons connected with the ever-growing influence of the Western civilization. But it is a truth none the less, and, in fact, the only truth which can save us from the chaos and the shame of our present decay.

The word Sunnah is used here in its widest meaning, namely, the example the Prophet has set before us in his actions and sayings. His wonder-

ful life was a living illustration and explanation of the Quran, and we can do no greater justice to this Holy Book than by following him who was the mouthpiece of its revelation.

We have seen that one of the main achievements of Islam, the one which distinguishes it from all other transcendental systems, is the complete reconciliation between the moral and the material sides of human life. This was one of the reasons why Islam in its prime had such a triumphant success wherever it appeared. It brought to mankind the new message, that the earth must not be despised in order that the heaven be gained. This prominent feature of Islam explains the fact that our Prophet, in his mission as an apostolical guide of humanity, was so deeply concerned with human life in its polarity both as a spiritual and a material phenomenon. It shows, therefore, not a very deep understanding of Islam if one discriminates between such orders of the Prophet as deal with purely devotional and spiritual matters, and others which have to do with questions of our society and our daily life. The contention that we are obliged to follow the commands belonging to the first group, but not obliged to follow those of the second, is as superficial and, in its spirit, as anti-Islamic as the idea that certain general injunctions of

the Quran were meant only for the Arabs at the time of the revelation, but not for the refined gentlemen of the twentieth century. At its root lies a strange under-estimation of the prophetic rôle of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). As the life of a Muslim is to be directed upon a full and unreserved co-operation between his spiritual and his bodily Self, so the leadership of our Prophet embraces life as a compound entity, a sum total of moral and practical, individual and social manifestations. This is the deepest meaning of Sunnah.

The Quran says :

مَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

“Whatever the Prophet gives you, that accept; and whatever he forbids you, that avoid.”

And the Prophet said :

تَفَرَّقَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَى أَحَدٍ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً وَتَفَرَّقَتِ النَّصَارَى عَلَى اثْنَيْنِ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً وَتَتَفَرَّقُ أُمَّتِي عَلَى ثَلَاثٍ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً

“The Jews have been divided into seventy-one sects, the Christians have been divided into seventy-two sects, and the Muslims will be divided into seventy-three sects.”

In this connexion it may be mentioned that in Arabic usage the number 70 very often stands for “many”, and does not necessarily denote a positive arithmetical number. So the Prophet obviously



intended to say that the sects and divisions among the Muslims will be many, and even more than those among the Jews and Christians. And he added:

كلهم فى النار الا واحدة

"...all (those sects) belong to Hell, with the exception of one."

When the Companions asked, which one would be the one, the right-guided group, he answered :

وهم الذين ما انا عليه واصحابى

"Those who follow me and my Companions."

This means that only those are on the path of spiritual success who accept the example of the Prophet and his Companions as the guiding principle of their life. Another verse of the Quran makes this point clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding :

قل ان كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعونى يحببكم الله ويغفر لكم  
ذنوبكم ان الله غفور الرحيم قل اطيعوا الله والرسول وان  
تولوا ان الله لا يحب الكافرين

"Say (o Muhammad) : If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins : verily, God is forgiving, merciful. Say : be obedient to God and the Prophet. And if they are rebellious:— verily, God loveth not the infidels."

The Sunnah of the Prophet is, therefore, next to the Quran, the source of Islamic law of social and personal behaviour. In fact, we must regard the Sunnah as the only valid explanation of the

Quranic teachings, the only means to avoid dissension concerning their interpretation and adaptation for practical use. Many verses of the Holy Qurān have an allegorical meaning and could be understood in different ways, unless we have some sure system of interpretation. And there are, on the other hand, many items of practical importance not explicitly dealt with in the Quran. The spirit prevailing in the Holy Book is, to be sure, uniform throughout; but the deduction of the practical attitude which we have to adopt is not in every case an easy matter. As long as we believe that this Book is the Word of God, perfect in form and purpose, the only logical conclusion is that it never was intended to be used independently of the personal guidance of the Prophet, as embodied in the system of Sunnah. In the next chapter an attempt will be made to explain the ultimate reasons for the linking up of the Quran, for all times, with the inspiring and directing personality of the Prophet. But even the simplest reasoning tells us, that there could not possibly be a better arbiter as regards the practical interpretation of the Quranic teachings than he through whom those teachings have been revealed to humanity. The slogan we often hear to-day: "Let us go back to the Quran, but let us not be slavish followers of Sunnah", merely betrays an

ignorance of Islam. Those who speak so resemble the man who wishes to enter a palace, but does not wish to employ the genuine key which alone is fit to open the door.

Here comes the very important question as to the authenticity of the sources which reveal the life and the sayings of the Prophet to us. These sources are the *Hadis*, the "sayings" reported and transmitted by Companions of the Prophet and critically collected during the first centuries after the Prophet's death. Many modern Muslims profess that they would be ready to follow the *Sunnah*, but they think they cannot rely upon the body of the *Hadis* on which it rests. It has become a matter of fashion in our days to deny, in principle, the authenticity of the *Hadis* and, therefore, of the whole structure of the *Sunnah*.

Is there any scientific warrant for this attitude? Is there any scientific justification for the rejection of the *Hadis* as a dependable source of the Islamic law?

We should think that the opponents of orthodox thought would be able to bring forward really convincing arguments which would establish, once for all, the unreliability of the traditions ascribed to the Prophet. But this is not the case.

In spite of all the efforts which have been employed to challenge the authenticity of the Hadis those modern critics, both Eastern and Western, have not been able to back their purely temperamental criticism with results of scientific research. It would be rather difficult to do so, as the compilers of the early Hadis-collections, and particularly the Imams Bukhari and Muslim, have done whatever was humanly possible to put the reliability of every Tradition to a very rigorous test—a far more rigorous test than European historians usually apply to any sources of old history.

It would be somewhat lengthy to dwell here in detail on the scrupulous method by which the reliability of Traditions was investigated by the early Muhaddisin, *i. e.* the learned men devoted to the study of Hadis. For our purpose here it may suffice to say that a complete science has been evolved, the only object of which is the research as to the meaning, the form and the way of transmission of the Prophet's Traditions. A historical branch of this science has succeeded in establishing an unbroken chain of detailed biographies of all those personalities who have ever been mentioned as narrators of authentic Traditions. The lives of those men and women have been thoroughly investigated from every point of view, and only those of

them have been accepted as reliable whose life and way of transmitting a Hadis perfectly responds to the test stipulated by the Muhaddisin and commonly regarded as the most rigorous possible. If, therefore, anyone contests to-day the authenticity of a particular Hadis or the system of Hadis as a whole, the burden of proving their inaccuracy falls upon him alone. It is scientifically not in the least justifiable to contest the veracity of a historical source unless one is prepared to prove that this source is defective. If no reasonable, that is, *scientific*, argument can be found against the veracity of the source itself or against one or more of its later narrators, and if, on the other hand, no other, contradictory report about the same matter exists, then we are bound to accept the Tradition as true.

Suppose, for example, that someone speaks about the Indian wars of Mahmud of Ghazni, and you get up and say: "I don't believe that Mahmud of Ghazni has ever been in India. It is a legend without historical foundation." What would happen in such a case? At once some men well versed in history would try to correct your mistake and would quote chronicles and histories, based on reports of contemporaries of that famous Sultan, as a definite proof of the fact that Mahmud had been in India. In that case you should be obliged to

accept the proof or you would be regarded as a whimsical person who denies, for no obvious reason, solid historical facts. If this is so, one must ask oneself, why the modern critics do not extend the same logical fairmindedness to the problem of Hadis as well?

The primary ground for a Hadis being false would be a wilful lie on the part of the first source, namely, the Companion, or one of the later narrators. As to the Companions, such a possibility can be ruled out a-priori. It requires only some insight into the psychological side of the problem in order to relegate such assumptions into the sphere of pure fancy. The tremendous impression which the personality of the Prophet created on these men is one of the outstanding facts of human history; and, moreover, it is extremely well *documented* by history. Is it conceivable that men who were ready to sacrifice themselves and all they possessed at the bidding of the Apostle of God would play tricks with his words? The Prophet said:

من كذب على متعمد فليتبوء مقعده من النار

“Whoever intentionally says a lie about me, is preparing for himself a place in Hell.”

This the Companions knew; they believed implicitly in the words of the Prophet whom they regarded

as the Speaker of God; and is it probable, from the psychological point of view, that they disregarded this very definite injunction?

In criminal court proceedings the first question facing the judge is *cui bono*—for whose benefit—the crime possibly was committed. This judicial principle can as well be applied to the problem of the Hadis. With the exception of the Traditions which directly concern the status of certain individuals or groups, as for example the decidedly spurious—and by most of the Muhaddisin rejected—Traditions connected with the political claims of the different parties in the first century after the Prophet's death, there could have been no "profitable" reason for any individual to falsify sayings of the Prophet. It was a just appreciation of the possibility of such Hadis being invented for some personal ends that the two foremost authorities among the Traditionists, the Imams Bukhari and Muslim, have rigorously excluded all Hadis relating to party politics from their compilations. What remained was fairly beyond the suspicion of giving personal advantages to anyone.

Then there is another argument on which the authenticity of Hadis is being challenged. It is said that either the Companion who heard it from the lips of the Prophet, or one or the other

of the later narrators might have committed—while being subjectively truthful—a mistake due to a misunderstanding or a lapse of memory or some other psychological reason. But the internal, that is, psychological, evidence speaks against any great possibility of such mistakes, at least on the part of the Companions. For people who lived with the Prophet everyone of his sayings and actions was of the greatest weight, owing not only to the fascination which his personality exerted on them, but also to their firm belief that it was an order of God to regulate their life, even in its minutest details, according to the direction and the example of the Prophet. Therefore they could not take the question of his sayings offhand, but tried to learn and to preserve them even at the cost of great personal discomforts. It is related that the Companions who were immediately associated with the Prophet made among themselves groups of two men each, one of whom was to be alternately in the vicinity of the Prophet, while the other was busy with the pursuit of his livelihood or other duties; and whatever they heard or saw of their Master they communicated to each other. So anxious were they lest some saying or doing of the Prophet might escape their notice! It is not very probable that, with such an attitude, they were negligent as to the



In these days, when the influence of the Western civilization makes itself more and more felt in Muslim countries, one motive more is added to the strange attitude of the so-called "Muslim intelligentsia" in this matter. It is impossible to live according to the Sunnah of our Prophet and to follow the Western mode of life at one and the same time. But the present generation of Muslims is ready to adore everything that is Western, to worship the foreign civilization because it is foreign, powerful and materially brilliant. This "Westernization" is the strongest reason why the Traditions of our Prophet and, along with them, the whole structure of Sunnah have become so exceedingly unpopular to-day. The Sunnah is so obviously opposed to the fundamental ideas underlying the Western civilization that those who are fascinated by the latter see no way out of the tangle but to denounce the Sunnah as being not compulsory for Muslims,—because it is "based on unreliable Traditions". After this summary procedure it becomes easier to twist the teachings of the Quran till they appear to suit the spirit of the Western civilization.

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## VI

### THE SPIRIT OF SUNNAH

ALMOST as important as the formal, so to say, legal, justification of the Sunnah through the establishment of the historical dependability of the Hadis is the question as to its inner, its spiritual justification. Why should an observance of the Sunnah be regarded as indispensable for a life in the true sense of Islam? Is there no other way to the reality of Islam than through that large system of actions and customs, of orders and prohibitions, some of them of an obviously trivial nature, but all of them derived from the life-example of the Prophet? No doubt, he was the greatest of men; but is not the necessity to imitate his life in all its formal details an infringement on the individual freedom of human personality? It is an old objection which unfriendly critics of Islam usually put forward, that the injunction of strictly following the Sunnah was one

of the main causes of the subsequent decay of the Islamic World, as such an attitude is supposed to encroach, in the long run, on the liberty of human action and the natural development of society. It is of the greatest importance for the future of Islam whether we are able to meet this objection or not. Our attitude towards the problem of Sunnah will determine our future attitude towards Islam.

We are proud, and justly proud, of the fact that Islam, as a religion, is not based on a mystic dogmatism but is always open to the critical inquiry of reason. We have, therefore, the right not only to know that the observance of the Sunnah has been imposed upon us, but also to understand the inherent reason of its imposition.

Here we have struck upon a problem deserving special consideration. Islam leads man to a unification of all aspects of life. Being a means to that goal, this religion in itself represents a totality of conceptions to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be detracted. There is no room for eclecticism in Islam. Wherever its teachings are recognized as really pronounced by the Quran or the Prophet we must accept them in their completeness; otherwise they lose their value. It is a fundamental misunderstanding of Islam to think that, being a religion of reason, it leaves its

teachings open to individual selection,—a claim made possible by a popular misconception of “rationalism”. There is a wide—and by the philosophy of all ages sufficiently recognized—gulf between “reason” and “rationalism” as it is commonly understood to-day. The function of reason in regard to religious teachings is of a controlling character; its duty is to watch that nothing is imposed upon the human mind which it cannot bear easily, that is, without the aid of philosophical juggleries. So far as Islam is concerned, the unprejudiced reason has already given it its unreserved vote of confidence. That does not mean that everyone who comes in touch with Islam will necessarily accept its teachings as obliging for himself; this is a matter of temperament and—last, but not least—of a spiritual illumination, or guidance (هداية), as it is called in the Quran. But surely and certainly no unbiased person would contend that there is anything in Islam contrary to reason. No doubt, there are things in it *beyond* the limits of human understanding, but nothing which is *contrary* to human understanding.

So far, the rôle of reason in religious matters is, as we have seen, passively controlling—a registration apparatus saying “yes” or “no”, as the case may be. But it is not so with the so-called “ration-

alism." It does not content itself with registration and control, but jumps into the field of negative speculation; it is not receptive and detached like pure reason, but extremely subjective and temperamental. Reason knows its limits; but "rationalism" is preposterous in its claim to encompass the world and all mysteries within its little individual circle. It hardly even concedes, in religious matters, the possibility of certain things being, temporarily or permanently, beyond the human understanding; but it is, at the same time, illogical enough to concede this possibility to science.

The over-estimation of this unimaginative rationalism is one of the causes why so many modern Muslims refuse to surrender themselves to the guidance of the Prophet. But it does not need a Kant to-day to prove that the human understanding is strictly limited in its possibilities. Our mind is unable, by virtue of its nature, to understand the idea of totality; we can grasp, of all things, their details only. We don't know what is infinity or eternity; we don't even know what life is. In problems of a religion resting on transcendental fundamentals we, therefore, necessarily need a guide whose mind possesses something more than the normal reasoning qualities and the subjective rationalism common to all of us: we need someone who is

*illuminated*—in one word, a Prophet. If we believe that the Quran is the Word of God, and if we believe that Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him) was God's Apostle, we are not only morally, but also intellectually bound to follow his guidance blindly. The expression "blindly" does not mean that we shall exclude our powers of reasoning. On the contrary, we have to make use of those powers to the best of our ability and capacity; we have to try to discover the inherent meaning of the commands transmitted to us by the Prophet. But in any case we have to obey the order, whether we are able to understand its ultimate object or not. I should like to illustrate this by the example of a soldier who has been ordered by his general to occupy a certain strategic position. The good soldier would follow and execute the order immediately. If, while doing so, he is able to explain to himself the ultimate strategic object which the general had in view, the better for him; but in case the deeper aim which underlies the general's command does not reveal itself to him at once, he is nevertheless not entitled to give up or even to postpone its execution. We Muslims rely upon your Prophet's being the best commander mankind could ever receive. We naturally believe that he knew the domain of religion both in its spiritual and its social aspect far better than we ever could.

In ordering us to do this or to avoid that, he always had some "strategic" object in view which he thought to be indispensable for the spiritual or social welfare of man. Sometimes this object is clearly visible, and sometimes it is more or less hidden before the untrained eyes of the average man; sometimes we can understand the deepest aim of the Prophet's order, and sometimes only the superficial, immediate purpose. Whatever the case may be, we are bound to follow the Prophet's commands, provided their authenticity is reasonably established. Nothing else matters. Of course, there are commands of the Prophet which are obviously of paramount importance, and others which are less important, and we have to give the more important precedence over the less important. But we never have the right to disregard any one of them because they appear to us as unessential. It is said in the Quran of the Prophet Muhammad:

ما يُلْقِ عن الهوى

"He does not speak of his own desire."

That is, he speaks only when an objective necessity arises; and he does it, because God orders him to do so. And for this reason we are obliged to follow the Prophet's Sunnah in spirit *and* in form, if we wish be true to the spirit of Islam.

Once the objective necessity, for a Muslim, to follow the Sunnah of his Prophet is established, he has the right, and even the duty, to inquire into its rôle within the religious and social structure of Islam. What is the *spiritual* meaning of that great, detailed system of laws and rules of conduct which are supposed to pervade the life of a Muslim from his birth to the moment of death, and to regulate his behaviour in the most important as well as in the most insignificant phases of his existence,—or is there, perhaps, no meaning at all? Was there any good in the Prophet's ordering his followers to do everything in the way he did it? What difference can it make whether I eat with the right hand or with the left—if both are equally clean? What difference, whether I keep my beard or shave it? Are such things not purely formal? Have they any bearing on the progress of man or on the welfare of society? And if not, why have they been imposed upon us?

It is high time for us who believe that Islam stands and falls with the observance of the Sunnah to answer these questions.

There are, to our knowledge, at least three distinct reasons for the institution of Sunnah.

The first reason is the training of man, in a methodical way, to live permanently in a state of



inner consciousness, tense awakening and self-control. Haphazard actions and habits are in the spiritual progress of man like stumbling blocks in the way of a racing horse ; they must be reduced to a minimum, because they destroy spiritual concentration. Everything we do should be determined by our will and submitted to moral control. But in order to be able to do so we must learn to *observe* ourselves. This necessity of a permanent self-control in a Muslim has been beautifully expressed by Omar ibn al-Khattab :

حاسبوا انفسكم قبل ان تحاسبوا

"Render yourselves account about yourselves, before you will be called upon to render account."

On a still higher plane this word is corroborated by the saying of the Prophet :

اعبد ربك كأنك تراه

"Worship thy Lord as if thou werest seeing him."

It has been pointed out before that the Islamic idea of worship embraces not only prayers but actually the whole of our life. Its goal is the unification of our spiritual and our material Self into one single entity. Our endeavours must be, therefore, clearly directed towards the elimination of the unconscious, uncontrolled factors in our life as much as this is humanly possible. Self observation is the first step on this way ; and the surest method to

train oneself in self-observation is to get the habitual, seemingly indifferent actions of our daily life under control. Those "small" things, those "unimportant" actions and habits are, in connexion with the psychic training we are speaking of, in reality far more important than the "great" activities in our life. The great things are always, by virtue of their greatness, clearly visible; and therefore they mostly remain within the sphere of consciousness. But those other, those "small" things, easily escape our attention and cheat our control. Therefore they are by far the more valuable objects on which we can sharpen our powers of self-control.

It might be perhaps in itself not important with which hand we eat or whether we shave or keep our beard: but it is *methodically* of the highest importance that we do things according to a systematic resolve. It is not at all easy to keep oneself in a constant tension of self-observation and moral control even if those faculties are highly developed in themselves. Laziness of mind is not less real than laziness of body. If you ask a man who is accustomed to a sedentary mode of life, to walk a long distance, he would soon grow tired and be unable to proceed further. But not so a man who throughout the whole of his life has been trained in walking. For him this kind of muscular exertion is no exer-

tion at all ; it is a pleasant action of body to which he is accustomed. This is a further explanation why the Sunnah covers almost *every* aspect of human life. If we are constantly called upon to subject all our actions and omissions to a certain intellectual discrimination, our power and aptitude for self-observation grow steadily and become a second nature. Every day, as long as this training proceeds, our moral laziness diminishes along with it.

The use of the expression "training" naturally implies that its efficiency is dependent on the consciousness of its performance. The moment the practice of Sunnah degenerates into a mechanical routine it entirely loses its educative value. Such has been the case with the Muslims during the last centuries. But when the Companions of the Prophet and the generations which succeeded them made the attempt to conform every detail of their existence to the example of the Master, they did it with a perfect notion of surrender to a directive will that would shape their life in the spirit of the Quran. Owing to this notion they could benefit by the training through the Sunnah to the full extent of its possibilities. It is not the fault of the system if the Muslims of later times did not make the right use of the psychological avenues it opened. This omission was probably due, in a very large measure,

to the influence of Persian Sufism with its more or less pronounced contempt of the active and the over-emphasis of the purely receptive energies of man. As the practice of the Sunnah had been already established as a component of Islamic religious life since the very beginning of Islam, Sufism did not succeed in uprooting it in principle. But it succeeded in neutralizing its active vigour and, therefore, to a certain extent, its utility. The Sunnah remained, for the Sufis, an ideogram of only platonic importance, but with a mystical background; for the theologians and legists, a system of laws; and for the Muslim masses nothing but a hollow shell without any living meaning. But notwithstanding the failure of the Muslims to benefit from the teachings of the Quran and their interpretation through the Sunnah of the Prophet, the idea underlying the teachings as well as their interpretation has remained intact, and there is no reason why it could not be put into practice once more. The real object of Sunnah is not, as the antagonistic critics presume, the breeding of Pharisees and dry formalists, but of conscious, determined, deep-hearted men of action. Men of such a style were the Companions of the Prophet. The permanent consciousness, inner awakening and responsibility in all they did—

here lies the secret of their miraculous efficiency and their startling historical success.

This is the first and, so to say, the individual aspect of the Sunnah. Its second aspect is its *social* importance and utility. There can be hardly any doubt that most of the social conflicts are due to men's misunderstanding of each other's actions and intentions. The cause of such a misunderstanding is the extreme variety of temperaments and inclinations in the individual members of society. The different temperaments force different habits on men, and the different habits, hardened through the usage of long years, become barriers between individuals. If, on the contrary, two or more individuals happen to have identical habits throughout their life, there is every probability of their mutual relations being sympathetic and their minds ready to understand each other. Therefore Islam, which is equally concerned with social as well as with individual welfare makes it an essential point that the individual members of society should be systematically induced to make their habits and customs resemble each other, however different their social or economic status may be in each case.

But beyond this, the Sunnah in its so-called "rigidity" renders even a greater service to society : it makes it coherent and stable in form and

precludes the development of antagonisms and conflicts such as have, under the name of "social questions", caused a considerable confusion in the Western society. Such social questions arise when certain institutions or customs are being regarded as not perfect in themselves, and therefore liable to criticism and progressive changes. But for the Muslims, that is for those who consider themselves bound by the law of the Quran and, consequently by the injunctions given by the Prophet, the conditions of the society must have a settled appearance, because they are supposed to be of a transcendental origin. As long as there is no doubt as to this origin, no need and no desire will arise to change the social organization. It is only thus that we can conceive a practical possibility for the Quranic postulate that the Muslims should be like a "solid building" (بنيان مرموص). If we fully apply this principle there should be no necessity for the society to spend its energies on side-issues and social reforms which, owing to their very nature, can have only passing value. Freed from dialectical confusion and built on the solid frame of the Divine law and the life-example of our Prophet, the Islamic society could use all its forces on problems of real material and intellectual welfare, thus paving the way for the individual in his spiritual

endeavours. This, and nothing else, is the real, religious objective of the Islamic social organization.

And now we come to the third aspect of the Sunnah and the necessity of our strictly following it.

In this system every item of our daily life is based on the example set by the Prophet. If we do this and avoid that, we are permanently compelled to think of the corresponding doing or saying of the Prophet. Thus the personality of the Greatest Man becomes deeply embodied in the very routine of our daily life, and his spiritual influence is made a real, ever-recurring factor in our existence. Consciously and unconsciously we are led to study the Prophet's attitude in this or in that matter; we learn to regard him not only as the bearer of a moral revelation, but also as the guide towards a perfect life. It is here that we must decide whether we regard the Prophet as a mere wise man among many other wise men, or as the supreme Messenger of God acting always under Divine inspiration. The viewpoint of the Holy Quran in this matter is clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. A man who is designed as "a Mercy for the Worlds" (رحمة للعالمين) cannot be but permanently inspired. To reject his guidance, or certain elements of it, would mean nothing less but the rejection or under-estimation of God's

Mercy. It would mean further, in the logical continuation of this thought, that the entire message of Islam was intended not as a final, but as an alternative solution of men's problems, and that it is left to our discretion to choose this or some other, perhaps equally true and useful, solution. This easy—because morally and practically not in the least obliging—principle might lead anywhere, but surely not to the spirit of Islam, of which it is said in the Quran :

اليوم اكملت لكم دينكم و اتمت عليكم نعمتى  
و رضيت لكم الاسلام ديناً

"To-day I have made perfect for you your religion, and fulfilled My favour on you, and chosen Islam as your religion."

We regard Islam as superior to all other religious systems, because it embraces life in its totality. It takes World and Hereafter, soul and body, individual and society, equally into consideration. It takes into consideration not only the lofty possibilities of the human nature, but also its inherent limitations. It does not impose the impossible upon us, but directs us how to make the best use of our possibilities and to reach a higher plane of reality, where there is no cleavage and no antagonism between Idea and Action. It is not a way among others, but *the* way; and the Man



who brought us this teaching is not a guide among others, but *the* guide. To follow him in all he did and ordered is to follow Islam ; to discard his Sunnah is to discard the reality of Islam.

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing I have tried to show that Islam in its true meaning cannot benefit by the assimilation of the Western civilization. But, on the other hand, it has so little energy left, that it cannot offer sufficient resistance. The remnants of its cultural existence are being everywhere levelled to ground under the pressure of Western ideas and customs. A note of resignation is audible, and resignation, in the life of nations and cultures, means death.

What is the matter with Islam? Is it really, as our adversaries and the defeatists within our own ranks will make us believe, a "spent force"? Has it outlived its own usefulness and given to the world all it had to give?

History tells us that all human cultures and civilizations are organic bodies and resemble living

beings. They run through all the phases organic life is bound to pass: they are born, they have youth, ripe age, and at the end comes the inevitable decay. Like plants that wither and fall to dust, the cultures die at the end of their time and give room to other, freshly born ones.

Once more we ask ourselves: is this the case with Islam? It would appear so at the first superficial look. No doubt, the Islamic culture has had its splendid rise and its blossoming age, it had power to inspire men to deeds and sacrifices, it transformed nations and created new states, and then it stood still and became stagnant, and then it became an empty word, and at present we witness its utter debasement and decay. But is this all?

If we believe that Islam is not a mere civilization among many others, not a mere outcome of human thoughts and labours and endeavours, but a law decreed by God the Almighty to be followed by humanity at all times and everywhere, then the aspect changes thoroughly. If Islamic culture is or was the result of our following a revealed law, then we never can admit that, like other cultures, it is chained to the lapse of time and limited by the rules of organic life. What appears to be the death of Islam is nothing but the death and

the emptiness of our hearts which are too idle and too lazy to hear the eternal voice. No sign is visible that mankind, in its present stature, has outgrown Islam. It has not been able to produce a better system of ethics than that expressed in Islam; it has not been able to put the idea of human brotherhood on a practical footing as Islam did in its super-national conception of "Ummat"; it has not been able to create a social structure in which the conflicts and frictions between the members are as efficiently reduced to a minimum as in the social plan of Islam; it has not been able to enhance the dignity of man; his feeling of security; his spiritual hope; and last, but surely not least, his happiness.

In all these things the present achievements of the human race fall considerably short of the Islamic programme. Where, then, is the justification for saying that Islam is "out of date"? Is it only because its foundations are purely religious, and religious orientation is out of fashion to-day? But if we see that a system based on religion has been able to evolve a practical programme of life more complete, more concrete and more congenial to the psychological constitution of man than any other thing the human mind has been able to produce in the way of reforms and proposals,—is not

just this a very weighty argument in favour of the religious outlook?

Islam, we have every reason to believe, has been fully vindicated by the *positive* achievements of man, because it has envisaged them and pointed them out as desirable long before they have been attained, as well as by the *negative* things, the errors and pitfalls of human development, because it has loudly and clearly warned of them long before mankind recognized them as errors. Quite apart from religious belief there also is from a purely intellectual viewpoint every inducement to follow confidently the practical guidance of Islam.

If we consider the Islamic culture and civilization from this point of view we necessarily come to the conclusion that its revival is possible. We don't need to "reform" Islam, as some Muslims think; because it is already perfect in itself. What we need to reform is our attitude towards religion, our laziness, our self-conceit, our short-sightedness, in one word, *our* defects, and not some supposed defects of Islam. In order to attain an Islamic revival we need not search for new principles of conduct from outside, but want only to apply the old and forsaken ones. We certainly may receive new impulses from foreign cultures, but we cannot substitute the perfect fabric of Islam

by anything foreign, may it come from the West or from the East. Islam, as a spiritual and social institution, cannot be "improved". Under these circumstances any change in its conceptions or its social organization, caused by the intrusion of foreign cultural radiations, is to be deeply regretted. The loss inevitably will be ours.

But with all this, we shall not deceive ourselves. We know that our world, the World of Islam, has almost lost its reality as an independent cultural factor. I am not speaking here of the political aspect of the Muslim decay. By far the most important feature of our present-day condition is to be found in the intellectual and social spheres: it is the disappearance of belief and the disruption of our social organism. Very little seems to have remained of the original soundness which was, as we have seen, such a peculiar characteristic of the old Islamic society. The state of cultural and social chaos, through which we are passing at present, distinctly shows that the balancing powers which once were responsible for the greatness of the Islamic World are nearly exhausted to-day. We are drifting; and no one knows to what cultural end. No intellectual courage remains, no spirit to resist or to avert the

torrent of foreign influences destructive to our religion and society. We have thrown aside the best moral teachings the world has seen. We belie our faith whereas for our forbears it was a living urge; we are ashamed whereas they were proud; we are mean and self-centred whereas they generously opened themselves out to the world; we are empty whereas they were full.

This lamentation is well-known to every thinking Muslim. Everyone has heard it repeated *ad nauseam*. Is it any use then, one could ask, to have it repeated once more? I think, it is. There can be no outlet for us out of the shame of our decadence but one: to admit the shame, to have it day and night before our eyes and to taste its bitterness. It is of no use to hide the truth from ourselves and to pretend that the World of Islam is growing in Islamic activity, that missions are working in four continents, that Western people realize more and more the beauty of Islam... It is of no use to pretend all this and to employ casuistic arguments in order to convince ourselves that our humiliation is not bottomless. It is bottomless.

Shall this be the end?

It cannot be. Our longing for regeneration, the desire of many of us to become better than we

are at present, give us the right to hope that it is not yet over with us. There is a way to regeneration, and it is clearly visible to everyone who has eyes to see.

It will consist in the shedding of that spirit of apology which is only another name for intellectual defeatism; only a masquerade for our own scepticism. And the next stage will be our conscious, resolved following the Sunnah of our Prophet. The Sunnah means no more and no less than the teachings of Islam translated into practice. By applying it as an ultimate test to the requirements of our daily life we will easily recognize which impulses from the Western civilization have to be accepted and which to be rejected. Instead of meekly submitting Islam to foreign intellectual norms we must learn, once more, to regard Islam as the norm by which we can judge the world. Only if we regain our lost self-confidence we can expect to turn our way upwards once again. Never will the goal be reached if we destroy our own social institutions and imitate a foreign civilization—foreign not only in a historical or geographical, but also in a spiritual sense.

As the things stand to-day, Islam is like a sinking ship. All hands that could help are needed



on board. But it will be saved if the Muslims hear and understand the call of the Holy Quran :

لقد كان لكم فى رسول الله أسوة حسنة لمن كان يرجوا الله واليوم الآخر

“ Verily, in the Prophet of God you have  
the best example for everyone  
who looks forward towards  
God and the Day of  
Judgment.”

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